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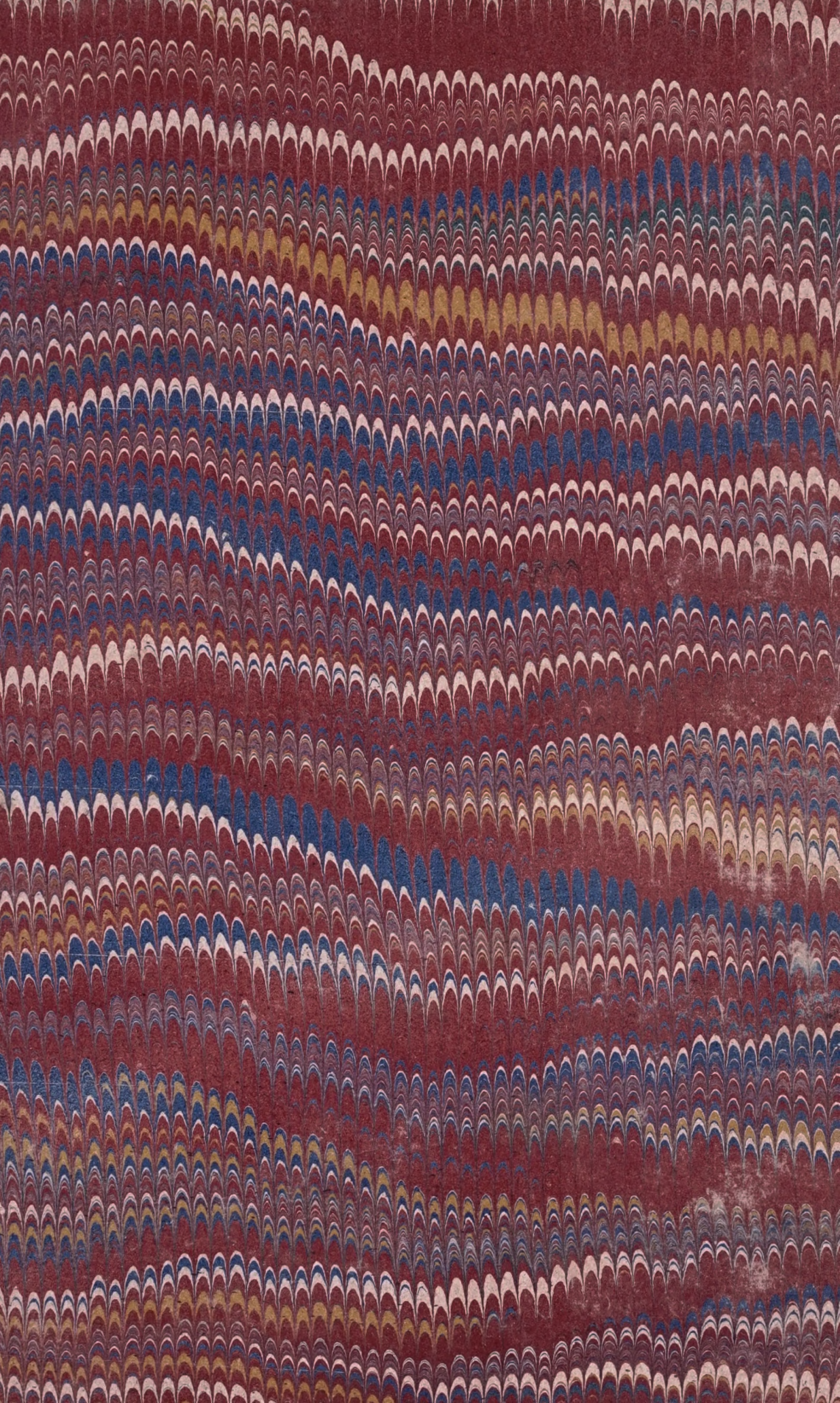
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By FLORENCE MARRYAT.

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MISS HARRINGTON'S HUSBAND.

BY

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MISS HARRINGTON'S HUSBAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE COUSINS.

THE house in which the room was situated was one of a street leading out of Park Lane; small, but expensive, and the apartment bore evidence of good taste. The curtains and chair-covers were of the palest pink cretonne, with shadowy flowers in gray traced upon it. The windows and the bed were shrouded in lace, and the oval mirror on the toilet-table was set in a frame of china Cupids and roses. Photographs of well-known paintings adorned the delicately tinted walls, and the scent of flowers pervaded the atmosphere.

The adjoining dressing-room displayed still more signs of luxury and comfort. Silver cases and cut-glass bottles, and ivory-backed brushes emblazoned with monograms, were thrown about in lavish profusion. The easy-chair was of velvet, the furniture of the washing-stand was of Indian china.

Embroidered slippers, and a quilted satin dressing-gown, to say nothing of pipe-racks and cigar-cases, showed that this apartment was dedicated to the use of one of the sterner sex, and that he was a man who loved his ease, and was accustomed to take it.

It was an afternoon in July, and for some time the chambers had been vacated; but evidently the house was not empty. The windows stood open, the air was very still, and every sound could be heard from below.

Voices, not loud, but distinct, rose in altercation from the dining-room, where the master and mistress of the house sat at luncheon, and continued for some time, the man's being far the louder and angrier of the two.

At last the quarrel seemed to be at an end. The hus-

band stamped through the hall and out at the front door, slamming it violently behind him; and after the pause of a few minutes the wife walked quietly upstairs, and entered the bedroom.

She was a beautiful woman of about five-and-twenty: she had a tall, slight figure, but symmetrically rounded at the bust and arms, chestnut hair, deep blue eyes, a straight nose, delicate complexion, and pointed chin with a dimple in it. Her face, moreover, bore the indication of great power, combined with the sensitiveness that always accompanies genius. It was a passionate face in every sense of the word. One could see at a glance that she was a loving, jealous, quick-tempered woman, who might bear a great deal up to a certain point—but, once thoroughly roused, would find it difficult to forgive.

She was a society actress, well known and appreciated in town, and the wife of Captain Gerard Legh, but she was generally called by her maiden name of Georgie Harrington.

As she came into the room now, her cheeks were crimson and her eyes were darting fire. She had evidently been repressing her feelings with some difficulty whilst below, and now they would have their sway. Her face twitched curiously as she walked up and down the narrow space for some minutes in silence, and then, suddenly sinking down upon a couch that stood at the foot of the bed, she gave vent to the burden that oppressed her in a burst of tears.

How she wept! Every now and then her sobs subsided, and it seemed as if she must have exhausted herself, and had no more strength to cry. And then the storm would commence again, and rise, by little and little, till it had reached the culminating point, and she would cast herself face downward on the cushions of the sofa, and writhe in the mental pain that was torturing her.

When she was at her worst—when her face was blistered and her eyes so swollen she could hardly see out of them—there came a gentle tap at the closed door.

“What is it?” she demanded.

“Only me, ma’am,” replied her lady’s-maid. “Miss Lacy’s here, please, and would like to see you.”

“Very good; ask her to come up.”

And then Georgie Harrington passed her handkerchief several times over her wet face, and sat up and tried to look more like herself.

In another minute Miss Lacy, who was her cousin, entered the room.

"Why, my dear Georgie!" she exclaimed, as she kissed her warmly, "what is the matter? Has that horrible man been ill-treating you again?"

At this question her cousin's lips quivered, and she had great difficulty in restraining her tears from flowing afresh.

"It is too bad!" exclaimed Marian Lacy, indignantly, as she sat down by her on the couch and took her hand. "It's the same thing, day after day, and you'll make yourself ill and unfit for work if you cry like this."

"I can not help it," replied Georgie, as she tried to swallow her sobs. "Gerard flew out at me to-day worse than ever, and all about my business transactions with Mr. Brabazon Chauncey. How am I to pursue my profession, or to make any money, if I am not even to be allowed to speak to an agent on the subject?"

"It is too absurdly ridiculous," said Miss Lacy, "and Captain Legh is going a great deal too far. If he is so particular as all that, I wonder he doesn't work for you, instead of allowing you to work for him. Then the business men would fall to his share, and he could leave you in peace at home."

"He does try to get work," interposed Georgie; "at least, he tells me so. He is always asking people; but, you see, he can't do anything. And his father, Lord Kinlock, is so set against it. None of the family have ever been in trade or business."

Marian Lacy shrugged her shoulders.

"And so dear Gerard prefers to live upon his wife instead, and to worry her until she has no heart left for her work. Georgie, I always told you what would come of this marriage, but you wouldn't believe me."

"I know you warned me against it, Marian, but I loved him so."

"You had a fancy, you mean, for his handsome face and figure, and were flattered at the idea of being connected with an aristocratic family. But what good did you expect from an actress marrying a man of his rank and position? The aristocratic family have never noticed you, and the whole thing is ending in a smash."

She was an attractive woman, this Marian Lacy, though in a different style from Georgie Harrington. She had dark

eyes and hair, a slender figure, small hands and feet, and a great capacity for conversation. She could hold men for hours by her fascinating talk alone, and most of them preferred her to more beautiful women. She was not on the stage, but so associated with actors and actresses that she spoke and felt like one of themselves.

"It's all very well to argue the point, Marian," says Georgie, with a sigh, "but the fact remains. Gerard singled me out for his wife, and declared I should never step upon the stage again. A twelvemonth after, on account of his extravagance, I was compelled to resume my profession, and my life has been one long misery since. He can never say enough against the stage and its followers. He abuses all artists, and calls them opprobrious epithets. In fact, Marian, I am sick and tired of it all, and I can not bear it any longer."

"I don't wonder at it, my dear. I should have cut the whole concern long ago. The wonder is that you've lived with Captain Legh so long. Not another woman in the world would have done it."

"But he can be very charming, Marian, when he chooses. Can I ever forget the first days in which I met him! I thought he was a god upon earth."

"I dare say you did before you married him. But see how he has treated you since. He spends half the day in bed, and the other half at his club; and should he condescend to look in at the theater in the evening, it is not to see you home, but to flirt with some of the other actresses. You remember the fuss there was about him and Lola Singleton."

"Don't mention it!" cried Georgie. "It nearly broke my heart!"

"And still you profess to love him. I can not understand it. He's the most selfish man I ever came across. It was a bad day for you, my poor Georgie, when you went to the Rudifers and met him."

"Ah, do you remember it?" cried the other, brightening up until her beautiful face looked radiant. "It was a Sunday evening, and I was so tired. I said at first that I could not go. But you persuaded me, and when it was nearly over and we were ready to return home, Mr. Coles brought Gerard up to introduce to us, and it was all over with me from that moment. I thought him the handsom-

est and most aristocratic-looking man that I had ever met; and I think so still. Wherever I go my husband is always the best-looking man in the room."

"That would be well enough," remarked Marian, "if he kept his fascinations for you; but as his wife is the last person he thinks of in society, my appreciation of his charms would not rank so high as yours. In plain words, Georgie, the time has come when you must act for yourself. He will kill you if this sort of thing goes on. What was the quarrel about this morning?"

"Sissy. Gerard says she is far too old to be about the house when I am so often absent, and I ought to send her to school. And when I replied I could not part with her, he was cruel enough to say I kept her because—because—"

"Because *what*?"

"She helped me in my flirtations, and prevented his knowing what was going on. And you know, Marian, I have not deserved *that*."

"You, who have never looked at another man since he married you; who are making yourself positively disliked in the profession for your coldness and supposed pride! Georgie, that man ought to be horsewhipped, and if I were you I would not stand it."

"I don't mean to stand it; that is why we quarreled. Gerard declared Sissy should go to school and I said she shouldn't. I can not part with her, Marian. I promised my dear mother on her death-bed that I never would; and since it is *my* money that provides her teachers, surely I may do as I think fit with it."

"Captain Legh evidently imagines you should not. By the way, Georgie, how do you manage about your money? You must be making a great deal. Do you invest it?"

"No; I pay it into my husband's bank. There is no *merum* and *turnum* between us."

"And he spends it as he chooses?"

"He has never denied me anything I may want," replied Georgie, coloring.

"Except what you like most—the society of your little sister. You will have to part with Sissy yet, Georgie."

"*I never will!*" cried Georgie Harrington, passionately.

"Don't I slave night after night to provide the means by which this house is supported and we all live? Why should my orphan sister be deprived of sharing in the benefit of

my success? My dear dying mother left her to my care, and sooner than part with her—”

“What will you do?” interposed Miss Lacy.

“Leave Gerard himself!” replied Georgie, with fixed teeth.

“Well, I don’t blame you,” said her cousin. “You’ve done more than enough for him already. He swaggers about town on your money, and doesn’t give you as much as a ‘thank you’ in return. Only the other day I heard that he passed himself off in Paris as an unmarried man.”

“Don’t tell me of it, please,” said Georgie, with her hand to her side.

“Very well, we’ll drop the subject; but you know it’s true. He can live on your earnings, but he’s ashamed of the very means from which he derives his livelihood. I am sure the very best thing you can do, my dear, is to leave him.”

“Perhaps it is,” replied Georgie; “but it is very hard, Marian, to think of leaving a man who has been everything to you for the last three years. It is like cutting one’s very heart out. All the interest in life will be over for me when I have to work for myself alone; and yet the cruel insults he heaps upon me in his tempers are almost worse to bear.”

“It is very plain that he does not care two straws for you,” said Miss Lacy, “and I begin to doubt if he ever did. I suppose he thought you were a good speculation, and would save him from the necessity of working. And you have been so foolishly fond of him ever since, and shown your affection so openly, that he imagines nothing will make you separate from him. Now just take my advice, my dear, and show him he is not paramount. Why should you make a point of remaining in London? Look out for a good provincial engagement, and leave my gentleman for a few months to see after himself. That would bring him to his senses, and make him value you a little more than he does at present.”

“But he will not consent to my going into the provinces,” replied Georgie. “I was offered an excellent ‘starring’ engagement with the ‘Valley of Joy Company;’ indeed, I believe Mr. Brabazon Chauncey holds it open for me—but Gerard was dead against it. In fact, it was the cause of the terrible quarrel we had last week.”

“Georgie, I have no patience with you!” exclaimed her

cousin; "you let that man spend all your money, order your affairs, and bully you into the bargain. You were foolish to refuse that engagement. What did Brabazon Chauncey offer you?"

"Forty pounds a week."

"Take it, my dear. You will thank me for the advice by and by."

"But Gerard will be miserable living here alone."

"Let him be miserable," laughed Miss Lacy, "it will do him good. I suppose he has some money of his own to live on?"

"Only two hundred a year."

"It's quite enough; and if he feels the want of the luxuries with which you have provided him, so much the better. Show him that you are independent, and he will respect you all the more. Why should you be abused and insulted and made a slave of, when you may have peace and liberty by only stretching out your hand for them?"

But this question was never answered, for at the same moment a carriage stopped before the door, and a thundering knock reverberated through the house.

Marian Lacy flew to the window.

"It's Lady Henry!" she exclaimed; "and actually alone, unless she has hidden Sir Fulke under the cushions. Georgie, you *must* go down and see her!"

CHAPTER II.

THE SOCIETY PATRON.

"I CAN not see her!" said Georgie Harrington; "my eyes and nose are so swollen, I look a perfect sight. And she will guess I have been crying, and tell the story all over London. Yet—now I remember—she appointed this afternoon to talk over the Hatleigh theatricals. Marian, dear, what *shall* I do?"

"Bathe your face in cold water, and put on a becoming wrapper. I will precede you, and tell her ladyship you have had neuralgia all night, and would see no one but herself. That will put her in a good temper, and she'll excuse anything. Don't be afraid she'll find you out, Georgie; neuralgia always makes one look as if one had been crying!"

"I will make an effort," said Georgie, walking to the washing-stand, "for it will never do for me to get out of favor at Hatleigh. The Prince and Princess of Wales were at their last garden-party!"

The visitor being announced, Miss Lacy went down to entertain her until her cousin should be ready, and pending her appearance they discussed the absent, after the manner of women.

"Ill? poor thing!" said Lady Henry Masham, in answer to Marian's apologies; "well, I don't wonder at it, considering the way in which Captain Legh neglects her. I assure you, my dear Miss Lacy, every one in town is talking about it; his flirtation with Sylvia Marchmont is perfectly disgraceful. A married man should have more respect for himself. I should throw up my engagement at the Delphian just to spite him, if I were Miss Harrington!"

"I don't see what good that would do," replied Marian Lacy; "if there is any doubt of Captain Legh's integrity—of which *we* know nothing—my cousin had better remain on the spot to check his actions. But I think you are too hard on him, Lady Henry; he may not be an immaculate husband, but I suppose he is no worse than others! And as for Sylvia Marchmont, she's a perfect child!"

Lady Henry nodded her head significantly.

"Not such a child as you think, my dear, and Sir Fulke Greville tells me all the clubs are talking about it; but if poor dear Miss Harrington knows nothing it is as well, perhaps, to leave her in ignorance!"

"I don't see how she should know it," returned Marian; "she is always on the stage when Sylvia is off; besides, Captain Legh is very seldom at the theater; he generally spends his evenings at the club."

"Well, Lord Henry and I have always led such a perfectly open and confidential life with each other that perhaps I am not competent to judge," observed her ladyship, "and, of course, I know nothing of Captain Legh's doings except from hearsay; such things do not come within my range of cognizance; but people *will* talk, and Miss Harrington is such a sweet creature; it seems a thousand pities she should be deceived."

At this tirade Marian Lacy opened her eyes in the utmost astonishment. Lady Henry Masham was a woman of about forty, well preserved, as ladies of the present day (who

know their way to Unwin's and Albert's) generally are. She was a clever amateur actress, and spent all her time and half her money on her favorite amusement. She possessed a confiding husband in Lord Henry, who was well content to remain at home whilst his wife ran over the country with Sir Fulke Greville, and a company of stage-struck ladies and gentlemen, playing wherever it pleased their fancy to do so.

Some people thought that such unusual proceedings on the part of the wife of a respectable gentleman did not entitle her to make any great strictures on the conduct of other women. But Lady Henry was a model of virtue in her own estimation, and no one was harder than she was on the faults of her neighbors.

She refused to believe that poor Lady Greville's life was spoiled by the continual absence of her husband on these theatrical tours, or that her own name suffered from association with that of Sir Fulke. She was bent on display and notoriety, and permitted nothing to interfere with her indulgence of it. She was hand-in-glove with all professional artists, and loved to imagine herself one of them. She threw open the doors of Hatleigh House to them freely; and whilst they laughed at her pretensions, they were not slow to avail themselves of her hospitality. But to hear her talk of her marital relations with Lord Henry Masham was so funny that Marian Lacy could hardly keep her countenance as she replied:

"I think Georgie's eyes are as open as those of any one. But she is not quite a perfect temper herself, you know, Lady Henry. She looks sweet enough upon the stage, but she is by no means an easy person to get on with in private life. I fancy there are two sides to the story. But here she comes, and I shall have to leave you. You will not mention to her what I have said, I hope. In all matrimonial squabbles I prefer to maintain a neutral position."

"Quite so, my dear Miss Lacy. I perfectly understand you," replied Lady Henry, as the door opened to admit Georgie Harrington.

She was looking charming in a pale blue satin tea-gown, trimmed with coffee lace; and her pale face, and hair in graceful confusion, only added to the interest of her appearance.

Lady Henry received her with enthusiasm, and Marian

Lacy having made her adieus, the two commenced to talk of the Hatleigh House theatricals, and what artists were to be secured to assist in the production of a drama of Lady Henry Masham's own composition.

Miss Harrington had named several who were likely to be at liberty, when her guest interrupted her:

"But you will take the principal part yourself, will you not, my dear Miss Harrington? I could not fancy my Lady Ella in any hands but yours."

"How can I, Lady Henry, when I have my own work to do?"

"The Delphian will be closed by that time. We don't play till September."

"I shall probably be in the provinces in September. I have been offered an engagement with the 'Valley of Joy Company.'"

"But you won't accept it, surely. You will never leave London."

"I don't see what there is to keep me particularly in London, Lady Henry," said Georgie, with a sigh.

"Why, everything! Your house—your charming husband—and your friends. No lady in the profession has the *entrée* to better houses than yourself. Ah! I believe I can guess the reason, Miss Harrington. Some mischievous little bird has been whispering tales out of school to you. Now, my dear child, take my advice. Don't believe them. If I had believed all the stories I've heard against Lord Henry since our marriage, I should have taken prussic acid long ago!"

"Indeed you are mistaken," murmured Georgie.

"No, I'm not. I've heard all about it, though of course I always say it is not true. But they're all alike, my dear girl; there isn't a pin to choose between them; they'll do anything so long as they're not found out. And if you marry a charming fellow like Captain Legh, you are bound to take the consequences. But he is not a bit worse than any other husband."

"But, perhaps," said Georgie, proudly, "I require something better than any other husband."

"Well, you won't get it, my dear! There are none made. Every one likes Captain Legh; he's so pleasant and gentlemanly—such a thorough man of society. It's no wonder he gets flattered and spoiled. But it would be

worse if he were such a nonentity that no one took any notice of him. Come now, my dear Miss Harrington, I must have you cheer up and look at the bright side of things."

"Shall we finish our arrangements for the Hatleigh theatricals?" said Georgie, gravely.

She could not bear to discuss so serious a subject with a comparative stranger.

She loved her husband so dearly, that to speak of his failings was like driving a knife into her heart, and she shivered under the infliction.

Lady Henry saw that she wished to turn the subject, and she took her cue from her. For the rest of her visit the conversation was solely of scenery, dresses, musicians, and all the paraphernalia necessary to a dramatic spectacle.

Georgie recommended her old friend, Mr. Brabazon Chauncey, as stage-manager, and an efficient person to provide artists at a reasonable price; and sat down, then and there, to write a note of introduction to him for Lady Henry.

She felt thoroughly tired when her visitor left her, but she also felt somewhat cheered.

To find that Lady Henry took such a different view of Gerard's conduct from what Marian Lacy had done, made her ask herself if she had not been too harsh in her judgment of him.

Was his behavior, after all, only that of every man in society, and was it her ignorance of high life that made her blame him unnecessarily, and caused the differences between them?

Georgie Harrington was a very proud woman, but she was also a very tender-hearted one. Her pride was her besetting sin. She had been both envied and sneered at for making a marriage above her position as an actress; and that the envious and malicious should have the power to smile at her failure to retain her husband's respect and attention galled her above everything.

In her present softened mood she saw things in a different light.

Perhaps, after all, she had not made sufficient allowance for his aristocratic breeding and mode of bringing up. He had not been used to the society she had; it was no wonder

if he looked down upon her friends, and treated them with more familiarity than was desirable.

The women made a fool of him too; of that she had been long aware, and she was too much occupied with her profession to go about with him as much as a wife should do. It would be hard if Gerard had to stand aloof from society because she could not enter it.

In half an hour after Lady Henry's departure Georgie Harrington had almost argued herself into the belief that she was as much in the wrong as Captain Legh, and had determined to tell him so when next they met, and see if it were not possible to commence their married life over again.

Usually she dined at four o'clock with her little sister Bertha, who had been known from her birth by the name of "Sissy," to accommodate the exigencies of her profession, and her husband took his dinner at his club.

To-day she would not have entered the dining-room at all if it had not been for Sissy, who sprung to meet her directly she appeared.

"Oh, Georgie! I thought you were never coming. How long Lady Henry stayed! I made Nelson ring the bell three times, to tell you dinner was ready!"

"Are you so hungry, then, my darling? When did Mademoiselle Sartouche leave?"

"Nearly an hour ago. She took me such a long walk in the park; I thought I should have fainted; I believe she has cast-iron legs!"

"You won't faint so easily, my little Sissy," said Georgie, with a sigh, "but I mustn't have you overtired. Let us have dinner at once!"

Sissy was a fine-grown girl of twelve, with twice the stamina and half the beauty of her elder sister, who had been a mother to her since her birth.

She had fair hair hanging down her back, blue eyes, a *nez retroussé*, and a wide mouth. She was not particularly clever, and showed no proclivity for the stage. But she was Georgie's especial darling—a sacred legacy left her by the best of mothers, and she spared neither trouble nor money where Sissy was concerned.

All day the child was under the care of an excellent French teacher. At night she was watched by the lady's-maid, and every spare moment that it was possible to de-

vote to her Georgie had her by her side. But she would not take her behind the scenes of the theater. Sissy often pleaded to go, but her prayers invariably met with the same result.

“Georgie,” said the girl, as soon as they were alone, “you’ve been crying!”

“What makes you think so, Sissy?”

“Do you suppose I can’t see it? Is it because Gerard was in such a rage this afternoon? Mademoiselle Sartouche and I heard him go out at luncheon-time and slam the door. Mademoiselle said it was not at all *comme il faut*. Is it that that made you cry, Georgie?”

“Partly, dear. Gerard was angry with me, and I don’t bear such things well. It was very silly of me to let it vex me, and I am quite ashamed of myself. Do not let us speak of it any more.”

Sissy was silent for a few moments, and then she said:

“Take me with you to the Delphian to-night, Georgie dear.”

“You can go to my box with Rachel if you like, Sissy.”

“You know I don’t mean that. I want to go with you and help to dress you.”

“I have said again and again I will not take you behind the scenes, so what is the use of asking, Sissy? The wings of a theater are no fit place for a child like you.”

“Just as fit for me as for you,” grumbled Sissy. “I shall be an actress myself when I grow up.”

“In that case you will have more than enough of them, my dear, and will be quite delighted to get an evening at home. I only wish I had the privilege of staying there now,” said Georgie, as she rose from table.

“May I sit in the drawing-room and play the piano?” demanded Sissy.

“Certainly you may, and read any book you find there. And I will come as usual and kiss my darling in bed as soon as I return home.”

CHAPTER III.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

MISS HARRINGTON’S dressing-room at the Delphian Theater, where she had been leading actress for two years past, was a marvel of prettiness. Her position compelled

her to keep up a good appearance, and her love of refinement did the rest. A blue cretonne chintz covered the walls and ceiling, being fluted over the latter as if it were a tent. Her dressing-table, instead of being a mass of powder and pigments, was draped in lace over blue satin; whilst close to it, on a handsome Japanese cabinet, stood a tray and a set of French china, in which tea was served for her and her especial friends each evening. Over the mantel-piece were black and gold brackets, interspersed by mirrors, before which stood the photographs of the greatest theatrical celebrities in London. A curtain hung on a circular rod to shut off all the arrangements for washing, and a couch, under the seat of which was a box to contain her dresses, completed the furniture of the little apartment, which was considered to be quite a specimen of a lady's theatrical dressing-room.

Miss Harrington's "dresser," too—a respectable woman of the name of Grayling—was always arrayed like a French *bonne*, in a high white cap and a voluminous muslin apron that covered her dress when she appeared to receive her mistress and help her in the mysteries of the toilet.

Georgie was rather hurried on the night in question. She had remained so long petting and consoling Sissy that she had allowed herself but twenty minutes from the time she stepped into her brougham to the moment she was to step upon the stage. The dressing had therefore to be accomplished with the utmost rapidity, and Grayling was not surprised to find her mistress silent and self-absorbed. As the toilet was near completion, however, she ventured on a remark.

"It *will* feel strange to me, miss," she said, "when the Delphian's closed for repairs. I sha'n't know what to do with myself in the evenings. If I may make so bold as to ask, miss, do you go on a holiday, or shall you take another engagement in London?"

"I don't know what I shall do yet, Grayling," replied Georgie, with a sigh.

At that moment Sylvia Marchmont, having first tapped for admission, rushed into the room. She was a clever young actress of not more than eighteen, who had lately come very prominently before the public. She was pretty also, with the *beauté du cochon*, and she was very frivolous, conceited, and gushing.

"Oh, my dear, darling, sweet Miss Harrington," she exclaimed, enthusiastically, as she sunk on her knees beside her, "how charming, how lovely, how divine you look! That white satin suits you better even than the yellow used to do. How you must 'mash' the fellows in front. If I were Captain Legh I should be quite jealous. But I suppose you don't tell him of all your little triumphs."

"I never think of anything so silly, Sylvia. What is the use of 'triumphs,' as you call them, to a married woman? They may be all very well for a silly little girl like yourself, but when you have found the one man you can love you will never think of any other."

"I don't think Miss Marchmont will ever leave off thinking of the gentlemen," observed Grayling.

"You're a cheeky old wretch, and don't know anything about it," said Sylvia, and amidst the laughter occasioned by her remark the call-boy shouted at the door, "*Miss Harrington called!*" and Georgie had to go upon the stage. She was a first-class melodramatic actress. She could move her audience to tears or freeze them with horror as she chose. She was a mistress of gesture and position, and knew exactly the right thing to do, at the right time, and in the right place; but to-night her heart was not in her work. She went through her part mechanically, and as soon as she left the stage her face relapsed into an expression of the deepest melancholy. She seemed to be an immense favorite privately as well as publicly. Faces lighted up and hands were eagerly stretched out as she appeared, and yet no one would have dared to utter an unseemly jest or tell an equivocal story in her presence.

Georgie Harrington had been for ten years upon the stage, and no one, however spiteful and malicious, had ever been able to breathe the least scandal concerning her. She had walked pure and upright amongst them, like a tall white lily in a bed of brambles, and the most careless of them all knew and recognized her as a good woman; but though she smiled back kindly on the recognitions of her friends, she would not linger amongst them, but walked straight back to her dressing-room, and remained there alone, until her services were again required.

As she came off the stage after the third act she caught sight of a figure that made her heart beat faster. It was that of a man leaning carelessly against one of the wings

and talking to Sylvia Marchmont. He possessed a tall, elegant figure, rendered more so by the evening suit he wore. His dark hair was cut close in the military fashion, and he pulled his silky mustache incessantly through his first and second fingers.

His eyes were of the darkest gray—like gray velvet—his nose was well shaped, and he had an oval face, and somewhat pensive expression of countenance.

His clothes had evidently been turned out by Bennett or Poole, and in his button-hole he wore a yellow rose.

This was Captain Gerard Legh, late of the 102d Buffs; and as Georgie's eyes fell upon him her cheeks flushed, and her generous heart gave him far more credit than he deserved.

It was not often that he made his appearance at the theater, and she believed that he had come to-night solely to make some amends for his violent conduct of the morning, and to show her that all was forgotten and forgiven between them.

She went up to him at once, quite ready, by a glance of her soft eyes, to let Gerard know she was willing to meet his advances half-way, but he did not give her the opportunity.

As he saw her approaching, he turned his figure round, so as to turn his back upon her; and though Sylvia called out, "Oh! Miss Harrington, Captain Legh is telling me the most ridiculous story about a monkey!" he did not express, by word or gesture, that he was even aware of her presence.

Georgie was deeply wounded.

She felt the slight paid her before the rest of the company much more keenly than if she had been alone, and walked in silence to her dressing-room.

"Have you seen your good gentleman, miss?" inquired the loquacious dresser, as she entered. "Because I think I saw him just now as I passed the greenroom. He is such a fine-looking gentleman, one doesn't forget him in a hurry. But, of course, if it was he you must have spoke."

"Yes, yes, I have seen him!" replied Georgie, hastily. "But this is my change-scene. Hand me the pink dress, please, and don't chatter; there is no time to lose."

At the same moment Sylvia popped in her head.

"Are you ill, dear Miss Harrington? Why didn't you

come and speak to us? Captain Legh will think you are cross. And I want you to hear about the monkey so much. It is the most comical story. One day, when Captain Legh was in the East Indies—”

“I think I have heard it before, Sylvia, and I have a bad headache,” replied Georgie, with her hand to her brow.

“Oh, you poor darling! How sorry Captain Legh will be! He seems so kind-hearted and good. Hark! Isn't that my call! I must be off. Good-bye, darling, and mind you put some *eau-de-Cologne* on your dear head.”

Georgie was once more alone, and wondering what she should do to avoid meeting her husband again. She *would not*, she told herself, with indignant tears in her eyes, be insulted in the same manner twice. If Gerard did not wish to see her, nor speak to her, why did he come to the Delphian at all? It was easy enough to keep away. And his conduct revived the memory of the morning's dispute, until she felt bitter and hard again, and the softer feelings she had cherished melted away. She tried to go backward and forward to her work after that without encountering Captain Legh, but he rendered it impossible.

He stood in the principal entrance, laughing and talking to Sylvia Marchmont, or any other girl who might be waiting her turn to go on, and let his wife pass and repass him without a sign of recognition.

At last the curtain fell for the last time, and Georgie flew to her room, thankful that the ordeal was over, and burning with indignation that it should ever have taken place.

As she sat there, dressed, and waiting for her carriage, she heard her husband's footstep in the corridor outside.

“Captain Legh,” shouted the voice of Jemmie Tasker, their first comedian, after him, “if you're waiting for Miss Harrington, she's just ready, and the brougham is at the door.”

“No, thank you!” came back in Gerard's suave and languid tones; “I'm due at the club, and my wife is quite able to look after herself. Good-night!”

A few minutes later Georgie walked out alone to her carriage; and running up against Sylvia Marchmont at the stage-door, saw the yellow rose which had been in Gerard's button-hole in the bosom of her dress, and also that she

tried to cover it with her hand, as they bade each other good-night.

As Georgie drove home her mind was in a chaos of doubt and indecision.

What should she say to her husband when they met again? In what words should she upbraid him for the unmanly conduct he had pursued toward her?

As she left the carriage at her own door her heart was hot with rage against him.

The first person she met was her servant Rachel, who usually sat up to prepare her supper.

"Oh, madame!" she exclaimed, "I wish you'd come up to Miss Sissy; I can do nothing with her!"

"Why! what is the matter, Rachel? Is she ill?"

"No, madame, not exactly ill; but there, I wish you'd hear her tell her own story. She knows it better than I do."

Much alarmed, Georgie flew up to her sister's room, where she found Sissy still dressed, but flung across the bed, and sobbing as if her heart was broken.

"Why, Sissy, my darling! what is the cause of all this?" demanded Georgie, as she took the girl in her arms and tried to soothe her.

It was some time before Sissy could speak coherently. She had cried till she had lost all control of herself.

But when she could make herself understood, her sister heard but one word, and that was a very unlady-like one—"Beast!"

"Who's a beast, darling?"

"Gerard! I *hate* him!"

Georgie started.

"Gerard! But why should you say so, Sissy? He never interferes with you."

Sissy had found her tongue by this time.

"Doesn't he, though? You know, Georgie, you told me I might sit in the drawing-room, and play the piano, and read the books, whilst you were away. And so we were sitting there quite quietly, weren't we, Rachel? for I had finished playing, and was reading the 'Arabian Nights' to Rachel, when Gerard came in, and he—he—"

But here Sissy's voice was again drowned in sobs.

"Yes, madame," continued the lady's-maid, "what Miss Sissy says is quite true. We was just sitting together

as quiet as could be, about nine o'clock, when in comes the master, and says, 'How dare you occupy the drawing-room,' he says, 'and who's been a-playing the piano, and mauling over the best books?'"

"Yes—yes!" cried Sissy, raising her head again, "and I said, 'I have, and Georgie gave me leave to do it!' And then he answered, 'You'll have to learn that I am the master of this house! Get out of the room, and go up to the nursery, which is the proper place for you.' So I said, 'I won't!' and then, Georgie—oh! Georgie!" exclaimed the child, with a fresh burst of tears, "he boxed my ears!"

"*He struck you?*" cried her sister, aghast. "Oh, it must be a mistake! He would not have dared to do it!"

"'Tisn't no mistake, madame," interposed the maid, "for I was present, and I see it done. The captain hit Miss Sissy several times, first on each side of her head, and then on the back and shoulders; and he pushed her right out of the drawing-room, and bade me go after her; and I haven't known what to do with the child, for she's been breaking her heart ever since!"

Georgie Harrington's face had become very white during this narration, and her frame trembled.

"My poor little Sissy," she said, as she caressed the sobbing girl, "don't cry any more. It is the first time you have ever been struck in your life, and you may take my word for it it shall be the last. Let Rachel undress you now, and no one shall come near you till the morning. He shall never do it again, darling. He shall never do it again," she murmured fondly, as she kissed the blonde head of her little sister. "Come, Rachel, put the child to bed, and go to bed yourself. You must both want rest."

"Will you not require my services in undressing, ma'am?" demanded the servant. "You are not going to sit up, surely."

"I shall not retire just yet, Rachel. I have some work to finish first. But I beg that you will put Miss Sissy to bed at once, and lie down by her side, for she will probably have a restless night after all this excitement."

And bidding an affectionate good-night to her little sister, Georgie Harrington went down-stairs to the dining-room, determined to remain there until her husband returned home to render the explanation she intended to demand from him. The story she had heard had made

her anger burn within her. That her sister should be turned out as an intruder from her drawing-room—the drawing-room she had furnished and kept up with the produce of her own labor—was bad enough; but to hear that Sissy had been struck! The child she had reared from an infant of a few weeks old—for whom she had toiled—whose cheek she had been afraid the breath of Heaven might visit too roughly—Georgie could better have borne the indignity of being struck herself. Her blood chilled as she thought of it, and her husband's other offenses seemed to sink into insignificance beside the crowning one of having used violence to Sissy.

The unhappy woman sat before her untasted supper long after her servants had gone to bed, waiting for the moment of Captain Legh's return. All the miseries of her married life, their quarrels, his contempt of her profession and her friends, and his neglect of herself, passed in review before her as she awaited his arrival, and made her resentment still more bitter.

At last she heard his latch-key in the door. It was two o'clock by that time, and all the household were asleep. Georgie walked quietly into the lighted hall and barred his way. As his eye fell upon her form he saluted her with an execration:

"What are you doing here at this time of night?"

"I am here to see you, Gerard, and to ask an explanation of your conduct toward my sister and myself."

"Then you won't get it. Stand out of my way, please, and let me pass into the dining-room. The best thing you can do is to go to bed, and not make a fool of yourself."

She permitted him to pass her as he desired, then following him into the room, she turned the key in the lock and secured it in her bosom.

"Now," she exclaimed, triumphantly, as she confronted him, "unless you use violence, which you will scarcely dare to do, neither you nor I quit this room until you have given me an account of your unmanly actions this day!"

CHAPTER IV.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

CAPTAIN LEGH was stooping to get some wine from the cellaret as his wife's excited speech fell on his ear. He

went on quietly with his occupation, filled a glass with the sparkling liquid, let it trickle slowly down his throat, and then replied in the most languid fashion:

"I wish you would confine your rehearsals to the stage or your private apartments. You know how I dislike melodramatic scenes. And this is neither the time nor the place for them."

"I shall not wait for either time or place," said Georgie, angrily, "and your assumption of indifference, Gerard, will not serve you in this instance. You have behaved in a most ungentlemanly manner to-day, both toward my sister and myself, and I will not stand it any longer!"

Captain Legh's eyes opened with professed astonishment.

"Indeed! You surprise me! And of what am I guilty? Do you allude to the amiable little scene that took place between us at luncheon?"

"No, I don't allude to that—you know I don't! It was bad enough, I allow. It is shocking to think that a man and woman who have sworn before God to love each other should have such bitter feelings in their hearts as we had then. But, at all events, it took place in private; no one but ourselves witnessed the extent of our degradation. It was not done in public for every fool to mock at!"

"As I think I have observed before," said Gerard Legh, as he lighted a cigarette, and threw himself into an arm-chair, "I am not so familiar with highfalutin' language as yourself, and must request you to interpret as you go on."

"I mean, then, that bad as our private quarrel was this morning, it was nothing compared to the insults you have heaped upon me this evening. First, in refusing even to recognize me before my friends—"

"I did not consider that after your intemperate conduct you deserved any recognition," interpolated Captain Legh.

"I will not be insulted in public, whatever my conduct may be!" she replied. "But, added to that, I find, on my return home, that you have dared to strike Sissy, and turn her out of the drawing-room!"

"*Dared!*" he echoed, angrily, roused from his apparent supineness.

"Yes! *dared!* What right have you, I ask, to exercise any authority over my little sister, who has been my charge since her birth? Above all, to use violence toward her when she had done nothing to deserve it?"

"She is a very impertinent child, and requires correction. I find her installed in my drawing-room, pulling about my best books, and battering my piano to pieces, and I turn her out, and send her to bed, and I have every right to do so!"

"*Your* drawing-room! *your* piano! *your* books!" repeated Georgie, scornfully. "Pray how long is it since they became yours? Who paid for everything in that room? Who pays the rent of this house, and for all that comes into it? You have forgotten the use of your possessive pronouns, Gerard."

"If you do it is only your duty," he replied, sulkily; "and what is yours is mine."

"You will find you are mistaken," retorted Georgie, "and that there is such a thing as driving a willing horse to death. And, with regard to my sister—I forbid you—do you understand me, Gerard? I *forbid* you to touch her again!"

"I shall treat her exactly as I choose. I never heard of such nonsense. A wife trying to come in this absurd way between her husband and a brat of a child!"

"I promised my dying mother—" began his wife, solemnly.

"Oh! we have heard all that before," interrupted Captain Legh; "please spare me a repetition of the dying mother and the sacred vow—"

"You have no heart!" cried Georgie, passionately. "You turn the most serious subjects into ridicule; and can not even sympathize with a daughter's love and respect for her dead mother. But I will do *my* duty if you have no sense of yours. I will protect Sissy from your brutality in the future, and if you presume to lift your hand against her again I will have you up for an assault."

Captain Legh lay back in his chair and laughed long and heartily. He had no more idea that his wife would proceed to extremities against him than that she would fly.

He thought she loved him too much for that. He forgot that some love, when driven too far, will turn to madness. His incredulous laugh drove Georgie almost beside herself.

"You may laugh!" she exclaimed, "but you will find out I speak the truth. You shall neither strike my sister nor insult me in public. There are means of putting a stop to both."

“Indeed!”

“I don’t wish to do it,” she continued, “but I can go to my manager and request him to forbid your being admitted through the stage-door. And if I tell him that your presence upsets me, and prevents my doing justice to my work, the order will be issued at once.”

“You would not *dare* do it!” cried Gerard Legh.

“I will dare everything to prevent a repetition of the insult I received to-night.”

“*Insult!* Rubbish! You don’t want me to be spooning you in public, I suppose?”

“I wish you to behave like a gentleman, which you did not do. No gentleman would let his wife’s friends see that he does not consider her worthy of his respect.”

“I shouldn’t think it signified what *your* friends thought or did not think. A set of low cads, sprung from Heaven knows where. It is paying them too great a compliment for a man of my position to associate with them at all.”

“It’s a pity then you come amongst them!” retorted Georgie, “for I don’t think you’re a favorite. They may be *cads* in your estimation, but I am not aware that any of them bully their wives or strike their sisters-in-law. And these humbler virtues go a long way, in my estimation, against the supreme advantages of being a gentleman who was kicked out of the army for his misconduct!”

At this taunt Captain Legh became enraged.

“Hold your tongue!” he exclaimed, loudly. “You are going a great deal too far. I have told you more than once that I will not have that episode alluded to. Whether I was kicked out of the army (as you elegantly express it) or not, I did you the honor to marry you, and you might be grateful enough to remember it; but I suppose I am a fool to expect gratitude from a woman. You had much better have married one of your actor friends. Then you would have been in your proper sphere, and your head would have kept straight on your shoulders; as it is, I believe you are cracked.”

And Captain Legh settled himself once more comfortably in his chair, whilst Georgie pressed her hands against her burning forehead as if she were trying to understand what he had said to her.

“Yes,” she ejaculated slowly at last, “I think it *would* have been much better if I had married a man in my own

profession, who *might* have been of as good birth as yourself, and *could* not have had worse manners. You are always running down the profession. You call actors *cads*, and actresses by names that are far worse. You say the stage is a pandemonium, not fit for any decent person to belong to, and yet sooner than work yourself you let your wife remain on it. That is what puzzles me. The bread you eat, the luxuries you enjoy, the very clothes you wear upon your back, are paid for by the proceeds of a calling which you say is altogether bad, the professors of which are bad, and not fit associates for decent people. And yet *I* may associate with them whilst I work for you. Do you call that manly?"

"They are in your own rank of life," he answered, roughly. "You have been bred amongst them. You have known no other society."

"That is a falsehood, Gerard, and you know it," she said. "My father was as good as yours. An officer in the army, and an *honorable* officer, mind you, who did his duty bravely to the last, but died too soon to leave his widow and children comfortably provided for. Don't dare to speak loweringly of my parents to me or I will throw up my profession at once and make you keep me. How would you like that? Most of my *caddish* actor friends support somebody; many of them maintain a family on their earnings. They would hardly understand a man living on the labor of his wife and insulting her into the bargain. But I suppose in *your* rank of life it is nothing uncommon. Quite the thing, doubtless, in the society *you* have been bred amongst."

"Come now, just stop your sarcasm, please," said Gerard Legh, rising, "for I've had enough of it. Give me the key. I'm going to bed."

But Georgie placed herself against the door.

"You are not going to bed, Gerard, until we have settled this matter. It is quite impossible we can go on living as we are living now. I have thought over it for months past, and I have come to a decision at last. It must be put an end to one way or another."

"And pray what do you intend to do?" he sneered.

"You must alter your conduct toward me and mine, or we must separate."

The idea seemed too ludicrous for him to entertain. He

did not believe it possible that his wife would ever do such a thing.

"*Separate!*" he repeated. "You must be mad!"

"I am not mad, Gerard! I am speaking the sober truth. This life of disunion is killing me! I can not go on with my work whilst it continues. And since our maintenance depends upon me, you must choose the least of two evils—control over your temper, or separation."

"I will not listen to such folly!" he replied, making for the door and pushing his wife to one side. "Give me that key at once and let me go!"

"Not till you promise me never to strike Sissy again."

"I will promise nothing of the kind. I am her brother-in-law, and shall chastise her as I think fit."

"You shall not! I will not allow you to have the slightest authority over her."

"*You will not allow!* What next? You want bringing to your senses, madame! I'll pack the brat off to school to-morrow if I choose, and so far away that you shall never see her. You'll tell me I have not authority enough for that, I suppose. It's about time you understood that a man is master in his own house, whoever is mistress. Give me that key," he said, advancing on her threateningly, "and let me go, or I will take it from you!"

"*Go!*" she ejaculated, throwing the key upon the floor, "and I wish it were forever!"

And then she threw her arms out across the table and laid her head upon them, and did not say another word to him.

Captain Legh picked up the key immediately, fitted it to the lock, and walked upstairs to his bedroom.

Georgie remained where he had left her. Her brain throbbed and ached with doubt and apprehension. Was it really true what Gerard said—that he had the power to separate her from her sister?—to send Sissy so far away that they should never see each other? Surely it was impossible. The law would not permit such injustice. But she was very ignorant of law, and she had heard it was a tricky thing, and one never knew what complications might not spring up if it were meddled with.

She had never had occasion to submit a question to any lawyer nor even see one, except Mr. Harman, who drew up her professional contracts for her. He was an old gentle-

man, but very friendly with her (for though old, he could admire the beautiful Miss Harrington as well as other men), and a sudden idea came into her head as she thought of him. Why should she not take his advice on the subject? He was experienced and trustworthy, and would never betray her confidence. She would go the first thing to-morrow morning and ask him what she should do.

As soon as Georgie Harrington had come to this conclusion she felt comforted. She had found a friend to whom she could confide her difficulties with some hope of receiving sound advice in return.

Her Cousin Marian and Lady Henry, and her bosom friend and confidant Louise Fletcher, were all very kind and sympathetic, but each one held a different opinion on the subject, and gave her different advice. But Mr. Harman would tell her what she was legally able to do in the matter, and she would know the best or the worst at once.

As she was thinking thus, the clock in the hall struck three, and she staggered to her feet, giddy with the emotion she had passed through, and half-blind from the time she had shut her eyes from the light.

Then she turned out the gas, and, drawing her cloak around her, followed her husband upstairs. But she did not pause at the door of her own room; she could not have entered there with the feelings that were raging in her heart that night, but passed swiftly upstairs and crept softly into that of Sissy.

Rachel, who was sitting in the moonlight, rose as she entered:

"Oh, Rachel! why are you not in bed?" exclaimed her mistress. "I told you to retire long ago!"

"I could not rest, madame, whilst you were up and about; and I guessed, somehow, that you would sleep here to-night. Let me undress you, madame, and see you comfortable in Miss Sissy's bed, and then I will go to my own."

Georgie Harrington was not the sort of woman to confide in her servants, but there was no need to do so. Her pallid face, and trembling frame, and deep-drawn sighs, combined with the sounds that had reached her from below, told Rachel that another of those unhappy dissensions that were becoming so patent to the household had taken place, and made her mistress ill and unhappy. She undressed her in silence, therefore, and saw her lie down by her little

sister's side, and turn her face upon the pillows as if she meant to go to sleep.

But long after Rachel had left her the unhappy wife lay silent, tearless, but wide awake, thinking over the coming interview with Mr. Harman, and wondering how much legal right she had to the possession of Sissy.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOSOM FRIENDS.

It was a matter of wonder to most people why Georgie Harrington should have made a bosom friend of Louise Fletcher. For, in the first place, Mrs. Fletcher was double her age. She was not on the stage, nor had ever been connected with it, although it was part of her creed to believe that, had she been an actress, she would have made a tremendous success.

If "Dickey"—as she used pathetically to observe—would only have let her come out as "Portia," or "Juliet," or "Ophelia," she was certain she should have raised the town.

But then "Dickey" was so absurdly jealous of her associating with any other gentleman. And, considering that "Dickey" was thirty, whilst she was fifty, it *was* certainly very absurd—that is to say, if it were true.

He was a rising actor, and much employed in the provinces, so that Mrs. Fletcher's time was at her own disposal, and she generally chose to spend it with Georgie Harrington.

She had been a good-looking widow, with a plump jointure, when he married her, and they had lived together very comfortably ever since. Louise (whose real name was Mary Ann), apparently adored her "Dickey," and he let her do exactly as she chose. Her greatest troubles, perhaps, were the signs of her advancing age, which she strove carefully to hide by plenty of false hair, powder, and rouge. She wore girlish costumes, and roguish little hats with spotted veils, which took off, perhaps, five years from her age whilst they were on.

It is needless to say, after this description, that Louise Fletcher was not a clever woman—indeed, in most things she was singularly foolish—and therefore it seemed all the

more strange that a sensible creature like Georgie Harrington should choose her for a confidante.

The secret lay in the fact that Louise Fletcher bore an appearance of the utmost sweetness and simplicity. Her voice was as soft as that of a cooing dove; and she always evinced the greatest sympathy and interest in the sufferings of her friends.

Georgie had heard that Louise's servants could tell a different story, but she never believed it. Mrs. Fletcher had always expressed so sincere an affection for herself. She was so ready to help in times of emergency. She so frankly acknowledged the superiority of her friend's talents, and was so grateful for direction and advice, that Georgie could as soon have believed in her own powers of deception as in those of Louise. Added to which, Mrs. Fletcher was so constant a visitor to the house, that it would have been difficult to keep any of its secrets from her.

She lived in the same street, and seldom passed a day without looking in, so that it became quite natural at last for Georgie to confide in her and tell her all her troubles.

She believed Mrs. Fletcher to be so sincerely honest in her affection—so true in her actions—and so honorable in keeping a trust, that she looked upon her as her best and truest friend.

Notwithstanding the difference in their ages, and tastes, and ideas, she regarded her as a sister, and would have shared with her all that she possessed or could procure.

On the morning after the scene narrated in the last chapter, Georgie Harrington rose from her bed with a heavy head and a heavier heart, and without taking any further refreshment than a cup of tea, walked straight down-stairs to the carriage, which was waiting to take her to Mr. Harman's. As she stepped upon the pavement she ran up against Mrs. Fletcher, arrayed in a youthful costume of blue and white.

"Why, where are you going, Georgie, dear?" she demanded. "Have you a rehearsal that you are off so early? I was just coming in to see you!"

"I have no rehearsal, but I am going out on business. Come with me, Louise. The presence of a friend will give me courage, and you know I have no concealments from you."

"I should hope not, dear, any more than I have from you," cried Mrs. Fletcher, skipping into the carriage. "I was only going into North Audley Street to get something for my Dickey. But perhaps you will drop me there as you return."

"Yes, yes, anywhere!" responded her friend; "but I must drive first to Mr. Harman. I am so anxious to catch him before he goes out."

Then, as the brougham set off, she added:

"Oh, I am so unhappy, Louise! Things are worse with us than they have ever been, and I am going to consult my solicitor, Mr. Harman, about it. Gerard threatens to send Sissy to school without my consent. Do you think he *can* do it?"

"I am sure I don't know, dear. I remember Major Mudhead took all his children away from his wife because she entered the Roman Catholic Church. There is no saying what the law will permit men to do nowadays!"

"Oh, it is cruel—it is infamous," exclaimed Georgie, "to take my little sister from me whom I love so dearly! It will kill me—it will kill me!"

"But why should he wish to do it, darling?" said Mrs. Fletcher, insinuatingly. "Does he want to spite you? Is he jealous, do you think?"

"*Jealous!*" repeated Georgie, starting. "Of *whom* should he be jealous? You know he is the only man I have cared for in my life."

"Ah, yes, dear, of course I do! But men are so unreasonable. There's my Dickey now; when he is playing in town he will never allow me to go behind the scenes. He is so terribly afraid of any man even looking at me. And yet I never flirt, do I? And I *have* heard Captain Legh talk very disparagingly of Mr. Brabazon Chauncey. He told me one day that he believed you cared more for him than for any one else in the world."

"Gerard must have been in a very obstructive mood that time," replied Georgie, half-smiling at the idea, although she felt so miserable. "I have known Brabazon Chauncey (who must be sixty if he is a day) ever since I went on the stage, and he has been one of my kindest friends; indeed, I consider I owe all my success to him. He is a theatrical agent, as you know, and I never see him except on business, like any other lady. *Why* my husband should have

taken such a dislike to him is a mystery to me. He has been his best friend also, if he only knew it. But here we are at Mr. Harman's office. He is about seventy-five. I suppose Gerard would be jealous of *him* if he knew I was about to pay him a visit. But with you by my side, Louise, there can be no impropriety in my seeing him."

Mr. Harman received the two ladies with much courtesy, and was greatly surprised to hear the import of Miss Harrington's visit. She rushed at her fences, as such impetuous women always do, without giving the poor old gentleman the least preparation for what was coming.

"Mr. Harman, I want you to answer me a question! Can Captain Legh, my husband, put my little sister to a boarding-school without my consent?"

"Bless my soul, Miss Harrington! you take my breath away! I didn't know you had a little sister!"

"Yes, I have!—Sissy Harrington—twelve years old. Her mother died when she was only three, and I promised her I would never part with the child. I have educated her at home, till now, but"—and here Georgie colored deeply, "but things have not been very happy at home lately, and Captain Legh says now he will part me from my sister. Can he do it? That is all I want to know."

"My dear young lady, you distress me very much!" replied Mr. Harman. "*Things not happy at home!* Dear! dear! very sad—very sad!"

"I assure you, Mr. Harman," commenced Mrs. Fletcher, mincingly, "that Miss Harrington has not conveyed to your mind a tithe of what she has to endure. Captain Legh behaves at times in the most violent manner toward her, and makes her life a perfect misery."

"Hush, Louise! hush!" said her friend, entreatingly; "that has nothing to do with the matter in hand. Let us keep to it."

"Well, dear, I've known you ever since your marriage, and if any one has felt for your sufferings it is myself!"

"I know you mean kindly," said Georgie, "but it is useless to trouble Mr. Harman with anything that is irrelevant to the subject of my sister. All I wish to know is, if my husband has the power to take her from me?"

The solicitor looked perplexed.

"I must ask you a few questions first, Miss Harrington.

Was there any agreement between you and Captain Legh relative to your sister before you married him?"

"None at all. She had always lived with me, and I never contemplated a separation between us."

"And she is of an age to go to school, you say? On what pretext does your husband propose to send her there?"

"He says she is rude and impertinent—but it is not true!—and that her presence in the house annoys him."

"And he does not intend, as I understand, to resort to any unusual means to separate you; he merely wishes to place her at a boarding-school?"

"That is all; but it is everything to me, Mr. Harman. It will break my heart to part with her!"

"My dear young lady, you will get over it, and Captain Legh will think better, perhaps, of his proposition. I hope sincerely he may, for I see no way of stopping him!"

"*No way of stopping him!*" cried Georgie, aghast. "Oh, Mr. Harman, don't say that! He struck her last night, poor little thing! though she has never been struck in her life before; and he abused me—oh! I can not tell you how he abused me!—and if he separates me from Sissy, I—I—" But here Georgie's feelings overcame her, and she burst into tears.

"My dear sir," Mrs. Fletcher seized the opportunity to say, "you must indeed think of some means by which to prevent such an outrage. Miss Harrington has enough to bear as it is. She works hard, night and day, at her profession, and if her mind is upset, she suffers both physically and mentally. I have seen her so ill, and in such distress at the same time, that you would have wondered how she ever got through her work."

"I can quite understand it," returned the solicitor, "and no one admires Miss Harrington's courage more than I do. But the fact remains that if a man maintains his wife's sister, he has a right to decide where and how he shall maintain her."

"But he *doesn't* maintain her!" exclaimed Georgie, suddenly raising her tear-stained face from the shelter of her hands. "Captain Legh doesn't maintain any of us. I pay for the house, and the servants, and the carriage, and everything out of my own earnings. How should he maintain us? He has only two hundred a year of his own, and his club bill amounts to more."

"*That* quite alters the case, my dear madame," said the old gentleman, rubbing his hands—"that quite alters the case. Then you may have everything your own way. Your money is your own, and the entire disposition of it lies in your hands. You may bank it, or invest it, or spend it as you choose; and Captain Legh has no more right to touch it, or to order how it shall be expended, than I have. The Married Woman's Property Act leaves you completely free!"

"*Free!*" ejaculated Georgie Harrington. "Is it possible? Free to do as I choose with Sissy and myself? But my husband told me yesterday that a man is always master in his own house."

"Ah, there you open up another branch of the question to which I should like to direct your attention," replied Mr. Harman. "As far as your own earnings or any money left you are concerned, you are free to will them away or dispose of them as you may think fit. But marriage is an indissoluble tie; you can not get rid of that. And if Captain Legh chose to make himself disagreeable in consequence of your taking the law into your own hands he might, you know—*he might*. He can not, for example, put your sister to school against your consent without running the risk of your refusing to supply funds for his wants; but, on the other hand, if you insist upon keeping her at home, there is no law to prevent his behaving unkindly to her—that is, within certain limits."

"But may he strike and hurt her?" asked Georgie.

"Well, hardly that, perhaps; and yet there are cases in which the law would uphold a brother-in-law, standing in the position of guardian to a child, striking her, if necessary for discipline; and it is difficult to draw the line between what is necessary and what is not. So I should advise a little judicious temporizing; a little soothing over of these domestic troubles; a little oiling of the wheels, as it were, so that Captain Legh may be coaxed rather than forced to keep the peace at home."

Georgie Harrington sat silent for a few moments, taking in the old man's advice; then she suddenly exclaimed:

"Mr. Harman, can I legally accept a provincial engagement without the previous consent of my husband?"

"Certainly. Captain Legh can follow you about, or in-

sist upon your returning home to fulfill the duties of a wife; but in that case he must maintain himself and you."

"Thank you," she said, rising. "You have enlightened me very much this morning, and you have given me comfort, at least so far as my sister is concerned. Nothing shall induce me to part with her."

"I hope you may be as successful in this, my dear young lady," replied Mr. Harman, holding her hand, "as you have been in everything else you have attempted. Don't be faint-hearted," he continued, as he saw the tears standing on her cheeks. "All may be right yet; indeed I feel sure it will, for a man must be worse than a brute to withstand such eyes as yours."

"Ah, Mr. Harman!" exclaimed Louise Fletcher, as Georgie passed swiftly down to her carriage. "he *is* worse than a brute, I can assure you; and if my Dickey (I am the wife of the celebrated tragedian, Richard Fletcher) had treated me half as badly, I should have left him long ago."

As she prepared to enter the brougham, Georgie asked her to give the coachman directions to drive to a certain number in John Street, Adelphi.

"Isn't that Mr. Brabazon Chauncey's address?" Mrs. Fletcher inquired, as she took her seat beside her.

"Yes; he offered me an engagement with the 'Valley of Joy Company,' and I mean to accept it. I will take Sissy away from London, and I will live on tour with some other lady; and then if Gerard follows us, which is very unlikely, he will be ashamed to ill-treat the child in the presence of a third party."

"Oh, my dear girl, he will not follow you. Fancy the refined and elegant Captain Legh knocking about the country with a company of provincial actors. Fancy his changing his residence every week, and putting up with second-rate lodgings and third-rate cooking. But I don't like to think of *your* doing it, my darling Georgie. You have not been used to it, and you can have no idea how uncomfortable it is. I went once with my Dickey, when we were bride and bridegroom, you know, and I could hardly stand it even then. Some of the beds were like sacks of potatoes, and the coffee and tea were never fit to drink."

"Oh, I sha'n't mind that!" exclaimed Georgie, despairingly, "I shall mind nothing so long as I am at peace; but I can not endure these constant quarrels. Louise, they are

taking all my heart out of me; and when there is added to them a constant fear for Sissy, life will be insupportable. We were so happy," she added, in a broken voice, "before dear mother died! There was never a dissentient word heard in our household; and now it is all jar and discord. Oh, Louise! sometimes I almost wish that I had never seen him!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE AMERICAN MANAGER.

MR. BRABAZON CHAUNCEY has already been named as a theatrical agent. His offices, situated in the most central position of the Strand, were easy of access to his clients, who found every comfort provided for them when they arrived there.

An outer chamber, furnished as a reading-room, liberally supplied with all the papers of the day, and ornamented by portraits of the leading actors and actresses (amongst which Miss Harrington prominently figured), received the visitors, until Mr. Brabazon Chauncey was ready to see them.

And into an inner sanctum, severely fitted with an official desk, behind which the theatrical agent sat, with keen eyes, ready to detect every fault in the faces and figures submitted to him, the ladies and gentlemen yet unattached were tremblingly ushered, one by one, to hear their doom.

In these offices Georgie Harrington felt quite at home. She had known Brabazon Chauncey ever since she was a child.

He was a friend of her late mother's, and had been the first to perceive her talent, and to place her on the stage, where he had watched over her carefully ever since.

Every engagement she had fulfilled had been made for her by Brabazon Chauncey. He cherished a high idea of her talent, and believed that in time she would reach the very top of the tree.

Her marriage and subsequent retirement from the stage had been a great disappointment to this kind old friend. He thought her career was over, and hated the very name of Captain Gerard Legh.

When, a year afterward, it was found that her husband

had spent the few hundreds he possessed, and was in debt besides, and Georgie came timidly to him to ask if he could procure her an engagement on the stage, he actually rejoiced over what most men would have regarded as a calamity.

By his influence she had been placed on the boards of the Delphian, and remained there ever since. And when Mr. Brabazon Chauncey found that the theater was to be closed for repairs, he urged her to accept a provincial engagement until it reopened. He had heard but little from herself of her domestic life, but he guessed a good deal; and rumors had reached him through others, so that he knew as much of her troubles as most people; and he was keeping the engagement open as long as he could, in hopes of inducing her to accept it.

As Georgie and Louise entered the waiting-room that morning, they found it full of young men and women. Naturally Miss Harrington's face was well known to most of them; and whilst some whispered to each other *who* she was, others rushed up with extended hand to ask after her health, whilst her name was freely bandied about amongst them.

The commotion raised by her appearance attracted the attention of a gentleman, apparently a stranger, who was walking about the room, and examining the photographed faces on the walls by the aid of a magnifying glass.

He was an uncommon-looking man, and yet he did not appear to be a foreigner. By his countenance he appeared almost young—certainly not more than thirty-five to forty—yet his hair was perfectly gray.

He had keen dark eyes—with bushy brows and long lashes—and (with the exception of a small mustache, some shades darker than his hair) a clean shorn face.

He was dressed more formally than an Englishman would have been at that early hour, wearing a frock-coat and dark trousers. He wore a magnificent diamond pin and finger-ring—both matchless in their way—and they were the only ornaments upon him.

But from the moment this gentleman's eyes fell upon Georgie Harrington he never removed them, but earnestly watched each expression of her face and movement of her figure.

This maneuver, unseen by the person who caused it, con-

tinued for some ten minutes, when a lad appeared from the inner office, and, addressing the gentleman, said:

“Mr. Brabazon Chauncey will see you now, sir.”

Without responding, the stranger bent down his mouth to the clerk's ear, and whispered:

“Who is that young lady in the brown costume?”

“Miss Harrington, sir, of the Delphian,” replied the lad, in the same tone, as he opened the door of Mr. Chauncey's office, and ushered the gentleman into the presence of the agent.

“How are you, Maxim?” exclaimed the latter. “Have you had a good look at my young ladies? William tells me the office is full this morning, and I can give you the pick of the London chamber-maids just now. Never knew the market so flooded as it is. Not enough comedy in the pieces nowadays. Have you found a leading lady yet?”

“No! Chauncey, what's that girl worth who's just arrived, in the brown costume? Your man said she's a Miss Harrington.”

“By George! Peters, is Miss Harrington, of the Delphian, in the next room?”

“Yes, sir; came about ten minutes ago.”

“I'll see her next. Why, Maxim, that's Georgie Harrington, who's been playing lead for the last two years at the Delphian. Haven't you seen her in ‘The Siren’?”

“Of course I have! I thought I recognized her face. By all the powers, Chauncey, she's the loveliest woman I ever saw!”

“I believe you, my boy; and as good off the stage as on.”

“I must engage her, Chauncey! What's her price? They would go mad over her in New York City!”

“I dare say, but she's not to be had. I have been trying to get her into the provinces, but she won't even leave London. Made a love-match, you know, and all that confounded sort of thing. Left the stage altogether at one time, but came on again after a twelvemonth. The best emotional actress we have on the boards, Maxim, but you won't get her to cross the duck-pond.”

“I'll give her four hundred dollars a week, and a certain engagement for two years, if she'll take it, Chauncey. Make the offer to her, at all events, and see what she says to it.”

"I will if you wish it, but I warn you that it will be of no use. Didn't you say something to me last week about wanting a principal dancer?"

"Dash the principal dancer—I want Miss Harrington. Such melting eyes, such a lissom figure, and such an enchanting smile! I wouldn't mind going to five hundred dollars if she'll sign for a settled time."

"Look here, my dear fellow, what's the good of raving in this manner over the unattainable? Mademoiselle Marie Zedrowna will have completed her contract with the Brussels Opera Company in October next, and could be with you by the fifteenth of November."

"I don't want to hear anything about her!" cried Seth Maxim, impatiently. "Settle my business with the goddess in the room yonder or I'll never speak to you again."

"In that case we had better say good-bye at once," laughed Brabazon Chauncey, "for I am confident she is not to be bought at any price. Why, her husband, the Honorable Gerard Legh, is a son of Lord Kinlock. I do not suppose he would hear of her leaving the country."

"Why is she on the stage, then?" demanded the American manager.

"Ah, well, there are private reasons for that. Captain Legh is extravagant, and his family are cool toward him on account of his having married this girl, who is worth the whole lot of them put together. So her husband lets her act in London, but has never allowed her to leave it yet."

"She supports him, in fact?" said Maxim.

"Something very much like it," returned Chauncey.

"A queer state of things," responded the American. "Why, in our country, sir, a man who permitted such a thing would be hooted out of society, and the woman who did it would be thought none the better of. I have learned a good deal since I came to England, but nothing that has surprised me more than to see how the men will live upon the women, and yet oppose every effort they make to support themselves. We treat the sex better in America, sir. It has been called the paradise of women, and it deserves its name."

"It is a grand country, Mr. Maxim, there is no doubt of that. But now, if you are in earnest about making this proposal to Miss Harrington, you had better pass out of my private door and round by the left into the waiting-room

again, and I will send for Georgie and speak to her on the subject. But mind—I give you no hope.”

“She doesn’t leave this office until she takes my offer,” said Seth Maxim, as he complied with his friend’s request.

“Peters, show in Miss Harrington,” was the next order issued by Brabazon Chauncey, and in another minute Georgie was standing before him. He rose eagerly and took both her hands.

“Why, my child, what’s the matter with you? You look fagged and ill! Is the work too much for you at the Delphian? The season closes on the twelfth of August, doesn’t it? You will soon have rest.”

“Oh, no, dear Mr. Chauncey, it isn’t the work,” said Georgie. “I like it. The variety, the excitement, they do me good; I could not live without them. It isn’t that; it is—it is,” she went on stammering, “that I feel I want a little change. London is so close, you know, and you said something the other day about the ‘Valley of Joy Company.’”

“Do you mean to tell me that you have decided to take a provincial engagement?” exclaimed Mr. Chauncey, as he made her seat herself. “But what does Captain Legh say to that?”

“Oh! he doesn’t mind,” replied Georgie, in a faltering voice, as the tears began to drop upon her gloved hands, “that is, he has no right to object. I am legally entitled to make my own contracts; and I want to get away for a few months, Mr. Chauncey. It will be best for all of us. Perhaps—perhaps—after a little separation—” but here her voice failed her, and she was unable to proceed further.

“Georgie, my dear girl,” said Brabazon Chauncey, “I am afraid you are not very happy at home.”

“No,” she answered, in a low tone, “I am not.”

“And that is the reason you wish to leave London—and—and Captain Legh?”

“Yes! I have never told you so much before, and I dare say you will be surprised to hear it now, but we can not agree, Mr. Chauncey. It is of no use trying; and it is better we should part.”

“The ‘Valley of Joy Company’ expects to be on tour for six or eight months. Will that be too long for you, Georgie?”

“The longer the better.”

"And Mr. Merrick will give you forty pounds a week! Will that satisfy you?"

"I would go for half. I want peace, not profit."

"But it is not business-like to say so, my dear. However, if your wants are so small, I think I have something in hand that will suit you better. What do you say to a New York engagement at double the terms?"

"New York! America!" she exclaimed, startled by the idea. "And I could take Sissy with me?"

"You can take a regiment with you, if you choose to pay their expenses. The facts are these. My friend, Mr. Seth Maxim, of the Excelsior Theater, in New York, is over here looking for novelties; and he has seen you in 'The Siren,' and wants to engage your services. He is in the waiting-room now. If you think you would care to cross the water, I'll call him in to make his own bargain with you. If you don't fancy the idea, say so, and I will close with Merrick."

"How long must I remain in America?" asked Georgie, with a white, strained face.

"Maxim will give you a larger salary if you will sign for three years; but I advise you not to sign for any stipulated period. The climate is treacherous. It might not agree with you; or Sissy or you might wish to return home for other reasons. But that you must arrange with him. The present question is, will you go?"

"Yes," replied Georgie, determinedly, but with clinched teeth, "*I will go!*"

"Peters, call in Mr. Seth Maxim," said Brabazon Chauncey, and he wondered to hear how hard Georgie was breathing during the interval that ensued.

The American manager entered the sanctum.

"Maxim, let me present Miss Harrington to you," said Chauncey. "I have been talking to Miss Harrington about the matter we were discussing just now, and she thinks she should like to visit America, if you come to terms together. So you had better tell your own story."

"I am delighted to hear of your decision, Miss Harrington!" exclaimed Maxim; "and I give you my word you shall not regret it. You will be appreciated in our country, madame. We know talent when we see it, and when we see it we acknowledge it. Your genius will meet with a

due reception at the Excelsior. Has our good friend mentioned terms to you?"

"Mr. Chauncey said something about them," commenced Georgie.

"We shall be happy to offer you four hundred dollars a week for three years certain."

"How much is four hundred dollars a week?" demanded Georgie, innocently.

"Eighty pounds, madame, of your English money; or five hundred dollars a week for a twelvemonth's engagement, renewable at option."

"I could not bind myself down to remain away for three years," she said, with a deep sigh. "I have home-ties, Mr. Maxim."

"So I understand, madame. Shall we say, then, five hundred for a twelvemonth?"

"Yes," she replied, trembling at her temerity.

"With a higher salary in case Miss Harrington remains with you more than a twelvemonth?" put in Brabazon Chauncey.

"Of course—of course! The lady understands that," said Seth Maxim.

"That may be, but we had better have it down on paper," said the practical agent. "Here, Maxim," he continued, handing him the necessary materials, "just scribble down your terms, and my clerk will give us a fair copy in ten minutes."

Peters was dispatched to his work, whilst Mr. Maxim enlarged on the beauties and delights of New York City to his new leading lady, and she listened with a heart throbbing with pain and fear. When the document was ready and she was told to sign her name, she grasped the pen with an energy which showed the desperate state she was in, and could hardly see what she wrote for the tears that blinded her eyes.

"I shall start for New York City on the twenty-seventh day of August, and you will be ready to accompany me then, Miss Harrington?"

"I shall be quite ready, Mr. Maxim."

"That will allow us a month for rehearsal before we reopen. You won't find that we scamp our work at the Excelsior, madame."

"And I trust I shall not be the first to set the example,

Mr. Maxim. Will you excuse me if I leave you now? I have a good deal of business on hand to-day, and doubtless we shall meet again soon. I play in 'Fedora' next week, if you will come and see me. Good-bye, dear Mr. Chauncey, and thank you. My theatrical life has been one long string of thanks to you."

She shook herself free of them as quickly as she could, and, calling Louise Fletcher, ran down to her carriage, and gave the order for "Home."

"What a time you have been, dear! I thought you were never coming out again," said Mrs. Fletcher. "Have you accepted the engagement for the 'Valley of Joy'?"

"No, no! Oh, Louise, I have done an awful thing which I can hardly contemplate without a shudder! I have signed a contract to go to America."

"*To America*," cried Louise Fletcher. "Going to leave us all for America! It is impossible!"

"It is not impossible," said Georgie Harrington, bursting into tears. "It is done and it can not be undone. I am going to leave him. I am going to America!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARISTOCRATIC FAMILY.

A FEW mornings after Georgie Harrington had signed her contract with the American manager, the family of the Earl of Kinlock were assembled round the breakfast-table at Summerhayes, a country-seat distant some twenty minutes by rail from London.

It would have been difficult for a stranger, newly introduced to the circle, to believe that the Honorable Gerard Legh had any connection with it, and yet he was the youngest son of the house.

Lord Kinlock, a venerable nobleman of seventy, might have stood for the portrait of a country squire, so round, and rubicund, and simple was the face, with its twinkling blue eyes and coronet of white hair, which he presented to the public; whilst his countess was an amiable, old-fashioned, and primly-dressed lady, who devoted all her time and thoughts to the conversion of the wicked and the relief of the poor. Her two daughters, Lady Hester and Lady

Alice Legh, had been brought up to regard life from the same point of view as their parents; and the elder brother, Lord Moberley, although long since married and settled in a home of his own, never failed to fall in with the family rules whenever he visited Summerhayes.

Lord and Lady Kinlock never went to a theater, and never sanctioned a member of their household doing so. They looked upon the stage as a sink of iniquity, and its professors as lost souls. With such opinions their feelings may better be imagined than described, when, three years before, they heard that their youngest son had committed the awful error of marrying an actress.

The Honorable Gerard had always been a source of anxiety to them. He was at once the beauty and the bane of the family. Lord Moberley was a very commonplace-looking individual, and the ladies Legh were decidedly plain. But then they never did anything they ought not to do. It was reserved for Gerard to fulfill the proverb that beauty is a snare. He had begun by being expelled from school for insulting the masters. He had followed this up by being *advised* to resign his commission in the army on account of some foolish practical joking, and he had ended his career by marrying Georgie Harrington.

To Lord and Lady Kinlock this did indeed seem the end of all things. They had been seriously displeased at his compulsory retirement from the service, and had decided on that occasion that he should live thenceforth upon his income, which was at that time about five hundred a year. Yet they would have relented, and increased his allowance, had he married according to their wishes. But his union with an actress was so terrible a disgrace and shame in their eyes that they abandoned him to his fate. The fate had seemed rather an enviable one in the honeymoon days.

Gerard had secured the only girl whom he loved, and was the proud possessor of one of the most beautiful and talented women in England. And in the first flush of his triumph he had been foolishly extravagant. Without letting his wife know the extent of his income, he had dived into the principal in order to "cut a dash," until he had impoverished himself, and compelled her to resume her profession.

Of this, however, the Kinlocks knew nothing. The "actress" had been a sealed book to them.

On first hearing the fatal news of their connection, her, they had requested Captain Legh never to mention the subject to them, and he had obeyed their wishes.

They did not refuse him admittance to Summerhayes. He was their son, and had a right to enter there, but they never inquired after his wife.

He might have been a bachelor, for the silence that was maintained regarding her. Even his sisters appeared to have no curiosity on the subject, or to shrink from it, as if it was an unholy thing.

Therefore Gerard's visits to Summerhayes had become like angels'—few and far between; and it was with general astonishment that, as his family were sitting at breakfast that morning, they saw the door open to admit him.

Captain Legh looked worn and weary, not to say dissipated; and his pale looks and air of fashionable languor were a strong contrast to the homely, healthy appearance of his parents and sisters.

"Why, Gerard!" said his father, elevating his eyebrows, "this *is* a surprise! What brings you down so early?"

"How are you, Gerard?" demanded his mother, as she busied herself with the arrangements of the breakfast-table. She spoke indifferently, almost coldly, but she felt more than she chose to express.

This son had once been a very favorite child of hers. What mother is not proud of a handsome, distinguished-looking son, even though he has been somewhat thoughtless and unruly?

Lady Kinlock's heart went out to Gerard, although her principles forbade her showing it. And so she covered up her natural feelings with an affectation which she called maintaining her dignity.

"I'm well enough, thanks. How are you all?" he answered, nodding round the table, as he sunk into a chair.

"I came up to see you on business, father, but it will wait until breakfast is over."

"Will you not join us, Gerard?"

"No, thanks. I never eat so early, and I had a cup of coffee before I started. But if you will allow me, I'll light a cigar."

"The open air is a better place for smoking in, this weather, than the breakfast-room," observed Lady Kinlock, dryly.

"You are right, mother. I will go and take a turn out—until my father is at liberty. I only thought that, as I have to go back to town almost immediately, I would see as much of you as I could whilst I stayed here."

He rose as he spoke, and lounged in his "haw-haw" style toward the French windows, which stood open to the ground.

Lady Kinlock sighed.

She would have preferred his throwing his cigar away.

But Lady Alice jumped up from her seat and prepared to follow him. She was the liveliest of the lot, and sometimes chafed under the rigid discipline imposed on her; and she had a great affection, too, for her younger brother, and pitied while she condemned him.

"I hope nothing is wrong, Gerard?" she said, as she joined him.

"Why should you think anything is wrong?"

"You look so anxious and worried—and you are so pale."

"Merely the effect of a London season, my dear! You would look pale too if you were up, night after night, until the small hours of the morning."

"I am very glad that I am not!" rejoined Lady Alice, primly. "I think papa and mamma are very wise not to permit Hester or me to mix in such scenes, nor to set us the example of doing so."

"Oh, certainly! How soon do you think my father will be ready to see me?"

"As soon as he has spoken to Nevill! He always gives him his orders for the day the first thing after breakfast."

"Have you heard from Moberley lately? Does he remain in Scotland for the grouse season this year?" asked Gerard, thinking he might get an invitation out of his richer brother.

"I believe not! Mamma had a letter from Helen yesterday, in which she says something about spending the autumn at Cannes."

"Just like my luck!" grumbled Gerard. "And where are you going yourselves?"

"I am not aware that we shall move. Papa and mamma owe a visit to the Brackleys, but if they leave home Hester and I shall stay behind. We don't care for gayety

and fashion, you know, and we have so many poor people dependent on us here, that we can not well be spared."

"That is all nonsense!" returned her brother, contemptuously. "I never saw anything like the absurd manner in which you and my mother coop yourselves up at Summerhayes. Why can not she take her place in society like other women of her rank and position? Every one remarks on it, and it is a very unpleasant question to have to answer, I can tell you!"

"I can quite understand *that*, Gerard!" said the voice of Lady Kinlock, close behind them; "and that you would feel it more than others. For none knows better than yourself the obstacles that have been placed in the way of my taking up a residence in London, even if I wished to do so."

At this interruption Captain Legh placed his cigar again in his mouth, and answered nothing.

"Your father is ready to see you now," continued Lady Kinlock, "and to hear what you may have to say to him. I trust, however, that you have not been bringing more trouble upon yourself and us!"

"If I have, mother, I shall not come to you for sympathy. You may rest assured of that," he answered, as he walked into the house again.

Lord Kinlock was in the library waiting in state to hear Gerard's news. His son's infrequent visits were so seldom the harbinger of pleasure that he did not feel very hopeful of it now; but the worst he anticipated was to hear of some fresh debt which Captain Legh was unable to meet.

"Well, Gerard," he commenced, as he motioned him to a chair, "I suppose it's the old complaint—want of money."

"I don't think I have applied to you so often for money of late, sir, that you need take it for granted."

"I admit I have not heard so much of your liabilities the last year or two, and so I trusted you had ceased to contract them."

"So I have, father, or at least none that I haven't been able to defray. My errand this morning is on a totally different matter. My wife is going to leave me!"

"*Your wife—is going—to leave you!*" repeated Lord Kinlock, with slow gasps of astonishment. Although he had considered his son's marriage a disgrace to the family,

he had never contemplated its ending in a scandal. "Going to leave you!" he continued. "Nonsense! You must not allow her to leave you."

"But I can't help it, sir. My hands are tied. And it is for this reason I have come down to consult you on the matter."

"I refuse to interfere," interrupted Lord Kinlock, quickly. "As you know, I have never recognized your marriage, and I never will. The calling of your wife is sufficient to preclude it. Do you suppose that I would bring an *actress* in contact with your mother and sisters?"

"I don't ask you to do so, father. I am not sure that it would afford my wife or me any pleasure if you did. But if you do not see your way to help me now, I am afraid it will return on your own head."

"I do not understand you, Gerard."

"The case is simply this, sir. My wife and I have had some little differences lately, and she threatens to leave me and go to America. Indeed she has already signed a contract to do so; and, legally, she has the right to follow her profession as she will."

"Then how can I prevent it, Gerard?"

"Hear me out to the end, father, and then give me your opinion. You know I was foolish enough to squander my small inheritance until it has dwindled down to two hundred a year. No man can live on such a sum. Since that time, therefore, my wife has supplied the necessary funds for keeping up our establishment from her own earnings; but she threatens now to take herself and her money across the water, and I have no power to stay her."

"Have you consulted Haldane about it?"

"Yes. The first thing I did was to go to him; but he says I am helpless. The Married Woman's Property Act enables her to cheat me as she will. You see what a nice fix she puts me in."

"But again I ask you, in what way you expect me to get you out of it?"

"I wanted to show you first how it will affect you if she continues in her determination. I can't live on two hundred a year. It would be a disgrace to you if I tried to do it. So that if Georgie continues obstinate I shall be forced to come back upon you; and I think you could prevent it by a little judicious interference."

"I really don't follow you."

"In plain words, sir, I want you to come up to London and see my wife about this matter. Point out to her the injustice of which she will be guilty; of the scandal she will bring upon our name; and the advantages of her sticking to a man like myself now she has got me."

Lord Kinlock moved restlessly in his chair, and looked uneasy.

"I really do not see my way to comply with your request, Gerard. I have not been used to mix with persons of the class from which, to my great sorrow, you chose your wife. She may be all that you once described her to me, but she belongs to a profession which I have been ever taught to regard with distrust and suspicion. Forgive me for saying I can have no sympathy with such people, and that I should be afraid to trust myself amongst them."

"She won't eat you," replied Gerard, grimly.

"I do not suppose she would listen to a word I said, if indeed I could find my tongue in her presence," continued Lord Kinlock; "and to remonstrate with a young woman over whom you should have all authority is more than you have a right to ask me to do."

"Very good," replied Captain Legh, tapping his boot with his cane; "then you'll have to make me some sort of an allowance, father, that's all."

Lord Kinlock was somewhat startled by the decisive nature of the assertion. Times were hard with him, as with most people, that season. The rents were long in coming in, and he had had to retrench as it was. To have to spare the Honorable Captain Legh two or three hundred pounds out of his own pocket was not a prospect to be contemplated with equanimity.

"Can not Mrs. Legh be persuaded to share her income with you?" he demanded.

"She says *no*. She chooses this way of showing her resentment for a childish quarrel that has taken place between us. But I believe she will yield to you what she refuses to me."

"What reason have you for thinking so?"

"The mere fact that women worship rank, and that my wife is not indifferent to the idea of being the daughter-in-law of an earl. But then you have never noticed her in any way, so that the connection has become an aggravation

instead of a thing to be proud of. If you were to pay her a visit, however, and talk the matter over pleasantly, I think the compliment would induce her to hear reason."

"I can not take your mother and sisters to call on her!" said Lord Kinlock, hastily.

Gerard Legh flushed to the forehead.

"I have already said that I do not wish you to do so, sir; although, as far as looks and manners go, my wife is worth the whole family put together. All I ask is that *you* should come up to town, and try to dissuade her from going to America."

"Well, I don't know that there will be any harm in that, Gerard, although I wish you had thought of some other means by which to accomplish your object. Will you prepare Mrs. Legh for my visit?"

"I think not. You had better appear without any preparation. Your presence will impress her all the more. Can you manage to come up to-morrow, sir?"

"I will endeavor to do so. Perhaps, after all, it is my duty to try and prevent the scandal of a separation between you. But it has been a sad business from the beginning, and can never be anything else."

"I shall expect to hear you have turned up to-morrow, then," said Gerard, who was not anxious to discuss his domestic affairs further. "You are sure to find my wife at home between three and six, and I shall keep out of the way till it is over."

"I will do my best," replied Lord Kinlock, as he shook hands with his son, and sunk back in his chair with a sigh. Gerard had set him a task he had never thought to be called upon to execute, and the only thing that carried him through it was the thought of the allowance, which, in the event of failure, he should have to make him out of his own pocket.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATHER-IN-LAW.

LORD KINLOCK did not find his daughter-in-law in a very submissive or amenable disposition. Her mind had undergone several changes since she had signed her contract with the American manager. She had experienced

sharp twinges of regret—not to say remorse—for having decided so hastily. There had been moments when she wondered if she were altogether wrong, and that it was *her* fault, and not Captain Legh's, that their married life was so unhappy. She had almost been on the point of telling him so—of granting him a full and entire forgiveness for all the misery he had caused her, and beginning afresh, as it were, and with a clean bill of health on both sides.

But her cousin Marian Lacy, and her bosom friend Louise Fletcher, had kept her back from committing such a folly. They had taken care that the memory of her wrongs should not die too easily. They had even threatened never to speak to her again if she was so wanting in knowledge of what was due to herself as to forgive a man who evidently despised her. And Captain Legh's own conduct had gone far to make her rejoice that the hour of release was at hand. On the first intelligence of her design he had stormed and raved at her until he was exhausted; and then had followed a period of silence, coldness, and indifference, during which no woman could approach a man without losing her self-respect.

It was whilst Georgie Harrington was living under this cloud that Lord Kinlock paid his promised visit to her.

Gerard had not mentioned a word of his journey to Summerhayes, and she was quite unprepared for the infliction.

She was occupied with Marian Lacy and her dress-maker, choosing costumes for the coming engagement, when the earl's card was put into her hand. Georgie glanced at it and turned visibly paler.

"Lord Kinlock!" she faltered. "What on earth is the meaning of this?"

"You don't mean to say it's your papa-in-law!" cried Miss Lacy, obtaining possession of the card. "My dear Georgie, you've played the trump! Your intended visit to America has actually brought out the aristocratic family to call on you."

"But what can he want?" demanded Georgie.

"Who can tell until you see him? Perhaps he has come to plead the cause of dear Gerard; to persuade you that he has never run up debts for you to pay, nor called you pretty names, nor flirted with other women, nor done anything unworthy of the noble name of Legh. And if you are good, and cry 'Peccavi!' his lordship may invite you

down to a Sunday dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding at Summerhayes, when the whole family will sit and stare at you with open mouths, as if you were a giantess out of a raree show."

"Oh, Marian, don't be silly! They have never expressed the least wish to see me since my wedding-day; it is not likely they would condescend to interfere now. It must be something much more serious that brings Lord Kinlock here. Can it be," continued Georgie, with a sudden tightening at her heart, "that anything has happened to Gerard? I have not seen him since yesterday afternoon."

"Nonsense, my dear! People like dear Gerard never have anything happen to them. They live forever to wear other people out. Depend on it the old lord has come up to plead his son's cause with you; and, after ten minutes' discussion, you'll burst into tears, and say you've been the one in the wrong; and Captain Legh will have something more to throw in your teeth the next time he gets out of temper."

"Never, Marian. You do not know me," replied Georgie, drawing herself up to her full height. "I am a long-suffering woman, and my repeated forgiveness of injuries may look to you like weakness; but when I have made up my mind I do not alter, and I have made up my mind now!"

"Well, my dear, all I can say is, I hope you have; for if it goes on much longer I firmly believe the man will kill you. The look of malice in his face when he speaks of your going to America is simply terrible. I should be afraid to live in the same house with him."

"I am not afraid of anything," replied Georgie. "But I must not keep Lord Kinlock waiting any longer, or he will think that actresses have no manners as well as no morals."

And so saying, pale as death, and proud as Lucifer, Georgie Harrington descended to the drawing-room.

Lord Kinlock had been so occupied in examining the pretty things with which it was furnished, that he was not sensible of having been kept waiting.

There was plenty of good, solid furniture, and valuable ornaments at Summerhayes, but there was very little taste; and the old gentleman (whose youngest son took more after him than he would have cared to acknowledge) was quite

lost in admiration of the room which an actress had adorned for herself.

And if he admired the room, he was equally struck by the mistress of it. What sort of a woman he had expected to see it would be difficult to say.

Perhaps he had pictured the professional artist who had threatened her husband to take the law into her own hands, as some masculine, over-blown beauty, well covered with paint and powder; and attired in such a fashion as no gentlewoman could tolerate or follow. Any way, his astonishment knew no bounds when the door opened to admit a slight, fragile-looking girl, dressed in a plain, fawn-colored cashmere, with a white, strained face; large, mournful blue eyes; and chestnut hair, piled simply on the top of her head.

There is no greater mistake made by the outside world than to suppose that actresses invariably go about with painted faces and noticeable dress.

No woman, who values her reputation for modesty or good taste would do such a thing; and the more an artist is made much of at night, the less does she care to be recognized and mobbed by day.

There are many professional women, unfortunately, who have the bad taste to paint by daylight, but they are generally second-rate artists. There are many ladies in private life who do the same thing, and deserve to be ranked no higher than the ballet-girls for their pains. But a gentlewoman remains a gentlewoman, whether on the stage or off.

Lord Kinlock had not had the opportunity of testing the truth of this assertion, and his surprise at seeing his son's wife was proportionately great. Indeed, he did not believe at first that the beautiful girl who stood before him could be Mrs. Legh. And when she had assured him of her identity he believed he had an easy task before him. He thought it quite impossible that this fragile-looking creature could hold out against the arguments he was prepared to bring against her.

He had risen hastily from his seat as she entered, but did not quite know how to introduce himself, or explain the object of his visit. But Georgie put him at his ease at once.

"Pray be seated," she said, gracefully waving her hand

toward a chair. "I suppose I can guess the reason of your unexpected appearance, Lord Kinlock. You have come to speak to me about my husband."

"I certainly am here," stammered the old gentleman, "with the desire to see and converse with Mrs. Legh. But, pardon me, if I say I can hardly believe you to be that lady."

"I am the wife of Captain Legh!" replied Georgie, proudly; "though I am not surprised you do not recognize me as such; and, as my time is precious, I should be glad to learn, as soon as possible, to what I am indebted for this tardy visit from Lord Kinlock?"

The earl began to feel uncomfortable, and to wish he had never come. A virago of middle age, or a bold beauty in paint and powder, would have been far easier to encounter in single combat than this proud-looking young woman who stood opposite to him with a frown on her brow, and one hand pressed against her heart.

"Pardon me," he said, taking refuge in courtesy, "if I say that I can hardly remain seated whilst you stand. I am an old man, but I am still too young for that!"

Georgie threw herself wearily into a chair.

"Very good!" she murmured, "I *am* seated."

"You hinted just now, Mrs. Legh," commenced the earl, "that my visit to you is a tardy one; I acknowledge it. Perhaps I wish *now* that it had been otherwise. But that is not my errand. My dear son Gerard came to Summerhayes yesterday in the utmost distress; he tells me you are about to leave him; I can not believe it is true!"

"It is quite true!" replied Georgie. "I have pledged myself to sail for America on the twenty-seventh of this month."

"And you leave your husband behind you?" said Lord Kinlock.

"I leave my husband behind me!" repeated Georgie, with compressed lips.

"This is very sad," rejoined his lordship, "and a very unusual proceeding. Have you reflected, Mrs. Legh, on the scandal that will accrue to your name, and the names of those connected with you, by such a proceeding?"

"I do not see that there need be any scandal about it, Lord Kinlock. I am an actress, forced by circumstances to earn my living. No one can blame me for earning

it by the best means presented to me. In going to America I fulfill an engagement that brings in double the money I can make in this country. What scandal is there in accepting it?"

"But without your husband, my dear lady; that is the improper part of it. You are too young to travel about alone, and the world will say you have separated because you can not agree together."

"Then the world will say what is right!" answered Georgie. "After totally ignoring my existence for three years, Lord Kinlock, you must forgive me if I can not recognize your authority to remonstrate with me on this subject; but, since you have introduced it, will you tell me if you have ever heard the true story of my marriage with your son?"

"I have not heard more than the mere fact, Mrs. Legh. The circumstance was a painful one to us; we felt disappointed in Gerard, and we have avoided the subject since."

"I understand you, my lord! Your family pride was hurt at the idea of your son marrying an actress, and though I have heard that you and the countess are reckoned to be very good and charitable to the poor, and solicitous for the welfare of their souls, you have left your own relations to live as they chose ever since, without even inquiring if they had souls to save or not!"

"You are rather hard on us, young lady."

"I am just, Lord Kinlock. Although I am on the stage, I have as good blood running in my veins as there is in yours; and I can not say I have not felt the littleness of your conduct. I am the daughter of Captain Harrington, of the Artillery, and had my father not fallen in the service of his country, and my mother died, leaving a mere pittance for the support of her children, I should not have been obliged to work for my living. As it was, I was too proud not to do so. I could never have lived on charity."

"Under such circumstances it was a praiseworthy act—" commenced Lord Kinlock.

"I do not wish you to praise me, sir. I am only desirous that you should learn the history of my life, in order that you may understand the reason of my present determination. Whilst I was working thus, to maintain myself and my little sister, I had the misfortune to meet your son. He was a loungeur behind the scenes of the theater where I

was employed, and he did not bear the best of characters even then. The fact of his having been turned out of the army was well known amongst us. He was also very much in debt. Writs and summonses were constantly out against him, and he was often obliged to hide from his creditors. Perhaps you have heard as much yourself."

"To my sorrow, I have!" said Lord Kinlock.

"My friends warned me against him," continued Georgie, "as soon as ever he began to pay me attention. But I was blind and deaf. A woman generally is so where her heart is concerned; and I loved your son very much, Lord Kinlock."

"*You loved him?* Do you not love him still, Mrs. Legh?"

"No!" replied Georgie, firmly. "No woman can love a man for whom she has lost all respect. I knew what his outward faults were when I married him. I knew that he was extravagant, thriftless, and dissipated, yet I thought that my love for him would cure it all. But I did not think that he would come to have so little regard for himself and for me, as to add cruelty and insult to the list of his shortcomings!"

"My dear Mrs. Legh, you shock and distress me beyond measure! *Cruelty and insult!* Surely my son has not been guilty of such outrages upon a woman! I had no idea that anything had passed between you beyond a slight difference of opinion, which might easily be explained away or atoned for."

"That is because you have listened to Captain Legh's side of the story, my lord, and not to mine. But I do not make an assertion which I can not prove; my servants, if I could stoop to appeal to them as witnesses, would tell you what I say is true. My relations and friends have long been aware of the state of things between us, and urged me to take some steps to free myself; but I have not had the courage to act upon their advice till now. And my determination has been taken more for the sake of my little sister than for myself."

"You have a sister, then?" said Lord Kinlock, who was becoming deeply interested, in spite of himself.

"Yes, my lord, I have an orphan sister who is entirely dependent on me, and Gerard promised when I married him that he would be a father to her. When I found that

he had spent the greater portion of his money I went on the stage again, in order that we might live, since which time I have asked my husband for nothing, not even the money for his tailor's bills—and in return I have had to endure—”

Here Georgie stopped, too much ashamed to relate the rest. Lord Kinlock thought she was giving way to emotion.

“Don't cry, my dear,” he said, kindly; “he is not worth it.”

“I am not crying,” replied the girl, proudly. “His conduct has ceased to affect me to tears—it only makes me indignant! It is enough to tell you, Lord Kinlock, that I have been subjected to your son's temper till I can endure it no longer—that I have borne indifference, and insult, and ingratitude from him—that he has even dared to strike my sister, and to threaten me with desertion—and that the time for my endurance is past! He can not support me, and he will not work. I have, therefore, decided to leave him, and seek my fortune in America. I shall take my sister with me, and Gerard will be free to do as he may choose. To live together under such circumstances is impossible. It is far better we should separate and be at peace.”

“If the facts are as you state them I can not blame you,” replied Lord Kinlock. “But what is Gerard to do when deprived of your assistance?”

“He has his own money,” said Georgie.

“It is hardly sufficient on which to maintain the appearance of a gentleman.”

“Then he can work. I have to do so—why not he?”

“But you make large sums, I presume, by your profession. Is it quite fair to refuse him any participation in your gains?”

“Did you come here to-day, Lord Kinlock, to dissuade me from going to America, or to persuade me to support your son?”

The old gentleman was taken aback.

“Well, really, I believe I came in order to try and make up this quarrel between Gerard and yourself. It would be so much better—so much more becoming on your part—if you resolved to stay at home, and do your duty to him as a wife.”

"In that case, Lord Kinlock, I am afraid you have wasted your time. You have not cared hitherto to exert the influence of a father-in-law over me, and your counsel comes too late. You had better try to persuade your son to do his duty as a husband before you lecture me on having failed in mine as a wife. I know that most men think there should be no limit to a woman's endurance, and you may be one of them. But I maintain that when the woman works hard to supply her husband with the necessities of life she is entitled to the same consideration that he would expect to receive from her. But no one could work for Gerard long. He destroys one's self-respect and lowers one's dignity. He treats one as a beast of burden, that is to be driven to labor by hard words and abuse; and it does not suit me. I have been used all my life to live with *gentlemen!*"

She pronounced the last word with so much meaning that she made her auditor writhe.

With all his simplicity Lord Kinlock was intensely proud of his birth and breeding, and to hear his son spoken of in such a contemptuous tone, and by a person he considered beneath himself, was gall and wormwood to him. He rose at once to his feet.

"It grieves me terribly to hear you speak of Gerard in such a strain, Mrs. Legh; but if I can not persuade you to listen to reason, it is useless my remaining longer here."

"I think it is, Lord Kinlock; for if you were to remain till midnight you would not alter my determination. I have been a long time making up my mind, but I shall not change it now. I dare say you do not like the idea of having your son thrown upon your hands again; but you have brought him up as a lazy, useless gentleman, and you must take the consequences. I wash my hands of him henceforward."

"You do not mean to return to him, then?" said Lord Kinlock, in alarm.

"At present I have not the slightest intention of doing such a thing. I fancy I shall be too happy to find myself free to think of it. And since you have set yourself so resolutely against his marriage with me, you should be the first to rejoice that the connection is likely to cease. I am only an actress, my lord, and Captain Legh has taken care

to inform me that you consider actresses as something too vile for you to mention."

"No, no, no! He has mistaken me!" interpolated Lord Kinlock, deprecatingly.

"But," continued Georgie, without heeding his interruption, "I am as proud in my way perhaps as you are in yours, and consider myself too good to be any man's foot-ball."

"And I think the same, Mrs. Legh," replied the old nobleman, holding out his hand. "And I can only regret that you should have been driven to this course by the misconduct of my son, and that I should have known you too late to be able to remedy it."

"You have at all events given me a pleasanter idea of you to carry away than I should otherwise have had," said Georgie, with her blue eyes filled with tears, "and I shall always remember your visit to me with feelings of gratitude."

In another minute he was gone, and her interview with Lord Kinlock was over.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTERNOON TEA.

A FEW weeks later, a party of women were assembled in Georgie Harrington's bedroom to view the beautiful costumes that had been prepared for her American expedition, and to watch the maid and dress-maker pack them away in the large canvas-covered trunks, with five and six trays apiece, that were destined to bear them across the Atlantic. Marian Lacy was there in full force, criticising and directing, and Sylvia Marchmont also, although the latter young lady had come on her own invitation, rather than on that of her hostess.

There was Lady Henry Masham, enthroned in state in the best arm-chair, and two or three other ladies whom Georgie had asked to afternoon tea, and they were all drinking coffee and chocolate, and eating sweet cakes, and talking at the top of their voices.

Georgie only, the center of attraction—and the proud possessor of the dainty fabrics that lay scattered on bed, and

couch, and chairs—was pale and silent. She gave her orders and answered the questions put to her mechanically, but none of the profuse compliments lavished on her wardrobe called up the ghost of a smile to her lips.

“You’ll have a nice sum to pay for duty on all these things, my dear,” observed her cousin Marian. “Why, you have as many boxes to carry about as Sarah Bernhardt. Do you intend *never* to come back to England again?”

“Never is a long word, Marian,” said Georgie, evasively; “but there are really not so many dresses as you seem to think. I have to provide five for each of the three first pieces I appear in; and millinery is so very expensive over there that I have been advised to take everything with me that I possibly can.”

“And I have the loveliest frocks!” cried Sissy, who was eating all the cakes she could get hold of, and treading on every one’s toes. “Georgie, why are my frocks not brought in to be looked at as well as yours? There is a blue velvet, Marian, and a ruby cashmere, and a lot of white frocks, and a beautiful pelisse all trimmed with fur for the winter, and—”

“Hush, Sissy: don’t talk so fast. You make my head ache,” said her sister.

“Your head is always aching now,” grumbled the child. “I never saw such a stupid thing as you are, Georgie. You are no good at all.”

“What an exquisite *confection* that is of white *crêpe* and silver, and that blue brocade trimmed with feathers. They never were made in London, my dear Miss Harrington, surely!” exclaimed Lady Henry, with her eyeglass to her eye.

“Oh, no; all the dresses on the bed are from Worth, and he sent them so exquisitely packed for traveling, I suppose he would be indignant if he knew that we had pulled them out of their wrappings before we started.”

“Worth’s bill will come to a thousand pounds,” observed Sissy, oracularly. “How I wish I was grown up and could spend money like that!”

“There is not much pleasure in spending money on one’s self, Sissy,” said Georgie, with a faint smile.

“Well, I’d like to try it, Georgie, any way, and see what it feels like. Miss Marchmont, you’re sitting right on my sister’s cloak!”

Sylvia Marchmont jumped up in a hurry from an opera-cloak of plush, much trimmed with lace and ribbons, which had been considerable crushed from the application of her plump little person.

"Oh, dear, Miss Harrington, I *am* so sorry! How can I have been so stupid! Do you think it is injured? Won't an iron smooth out those creases?"

"Pray don't concern yourself about it," replied Georgie, "it is not the slightest consequence. Rachel, take those things off the back of Miss Marchmont's chair, and put them anywhere out of the way."

"Well, I never saw any one so indifferent to pretty things as you are in my life!" said Sylvia. "I should have cried my eyes out if that had happened to me. But then I couldn't afford it on six pounds a week, could I?"

"Miss Harrington has a soul above ribbons and laces," remarked Lady Henry. "Oh, my dear creature, what are we to do without you? Who is to supply your place at the Delphian until you come back again?"

"What will poor Captain Legh do without her? *That* is the question!" cried Sylvia Marchmont. "I do pity the poor fellow so; he will be quite lost when you are gone, Miss Harrington."

Georgie did not answer her, but turned toward Marian Lacy.

"When did you see this much-to-be-pitied creature last?" asked the latter, in a low tone.

"Not since Thursday," was the reply; "but it is better so. Our interviews have not been so pleasant lately that they can not be dispensed with."

"He is a brute!" said Marian, emphatically, between her teeth.

"No, Marian, don't say that! It will soon be all over now, so we can afford to hold our tongues about it."

"Have you heard anything further from your aristocratic relations?"

"I had a letter from Lord Kinlock yesterday."

"What did he say?"

"He asked me to make his son an allowance during my absence."

"And you consented?"

"Yes!"

"Georgie, you are the weakest woman I ever met. You

would fall into that man's arms to-morrow if he went the right way to ask it!"

"No, Marian, I don't think I should. But don't discuss the matter further. I have done what I consider to be right, and there is an end of it."

At this juncture the door opened to admit Mrs. Fletcher, "dressed to kill," and overflowing with a piece of news.

"My darling girl," she exclaimed effusively, as she embraced Miss Harrington, "guess!—guess what I have to tell you! But you never will! It is impossible! For it is the most charming and delightful thing that ever happened in all the world."

"Then I'm sure I can't guess it," said Georgie, with a smothered sigh.

"My dear, I have been bursting ever since I heard it, and I should have been here an hour ago only Dicky was detained in the Strand. Fancy—only just fancy!—Chauncey has engaged him for one of Mr. Maxim's traveling companies, and he is to start the same time as you do!"

"Oh, I *am* glad!" exclaimed Georgie. "Mr. Fletcher is sure to get on in America, and he so well deserves all the luck he may get. You must give him my sincere congratulations, Louise."

"Yes; but, darling, you don't understand. Can not you guess what it must lead to? Do you suppose I would consent to be left alone in England without either you or Dickey? Of course not! And so *I* am going too; and if Dickey has to travel far he will leave me with you in New York, so I shall be always at hand to keep you company, dear, as I do here."

"And you will live with me!" said her friend.

"Of course I will! Only too delighted if you will have me."

"Oh, I *am* glad—I *am* glad!" cried Georgie, in an excited manner, as she suddenly burst into tears.

The prospect of solitude in a strange land had been weighing painfully upon her spirits, and the idea of having her dearest friend with her, and one who sympathized so entirely with all she was passing through, seemed for the moment to make everything right. She laughed and cried in Louise Fletcher's arms, and became so excited as to betray to more than one of the party the secret she had tried to conceal.

Then the conversation turned upon the New World they were going to; and Georgie was in the midst of an animated description of the steamer by which she was to sail, and the comforts that had been provided for her on board, when a servant entered to hand her a letter which had just come by post.

Marian Lacy was watching her cousin at the time, and saw the light die out of her eye and the flush fade from her cheek, as she looked at the address on the envelope.

Miss Lacy recognized it also, although it was held upside down, for it was a bold handwriting, which she knew to be that of Captain Legh.

"She loves him still!" she thought to herself. "Whatever she may say or do, she loves him still!"

An hour later she was walking back to her mother's house in Baker Street when she came upon Gerard, dressed in the height of the fashion, lounging along Park Lane.

"Captain Legh!" she exclaimed. "Is this really you? I thought you were out of town. Where are you staying?"

"With friends!" he answered, curtly.

"But why are you not at home? Georgie tells me she has not seen you since last Thursday."

"Home is altogether too hot for me at present, Miss Lacy."

"You mean it is too cold. I think Georgie is growing utterly indifferent to everything. I left her just now, surrounded by a bevy of women doing homage to her new dresses and herself."

"That is all she cares for—admiration! If she can't get it by fair means, she will by foul. It is at the bottom of her going to America. Well, she will be free to take as much as ever she can get of it there."

"Why are you not going with her, Captain Legh?"

"I have not been asked, Miss Lacy."

"Poor fellow! I really *do* think it's a shame that you're left out of the business altogether in this way. Have you heard that the Fletchers sail by the same steamer, and that Louise and Georgie have come to some arrangement to live together?"

"No! I have heard nothing. My wife does not condescend to tell me her news."

"It is the truth. Georgie is, of course, delighted at the

idea. If she has her 'dear Louise' with her she will care for nothing else."

"Well, Mrs. Fletcher is *my* friend decidedly," said Captain Legh, "and will, I am sure, look after my interests on the other side. It is just as well that Georgie should have some one to remind her occasionally that she has a husband in the land of the living."

Marian Lacy opened her eyes.

"*Your* friend! Does she say so? Well, in my humble opinion, she is a deceitful old cat, who doesn't care for anybody but herself. But Georgie never would listen to my advice on the subject."

"What day does she sail from Liverpool?"

Marian hesitated.

"I am not quite sure. I think it is the thirtieth."

"I thought it was to be the twenty-seventh."

"Yes; but I believe there is some reason for delay. Why do you ask? Are you going to see her off?"

Captain Legh laughed satirically.

"*See her off!* Is it likely? Have our relations been so amicable lately as to make me anxious to obtrude my attentions on her? Oh, no! The beautiful Miss Harrington will have plenty of people to see her off. I only wish to know how long it will be before I can return home without fear of annoyance."

"It sounds dreadfully sad to hear you say that! But now I come to think of it, I really believe she does start on the twenty-seventh. Anyhow, I will send a line to your club as soon as she is off."

"Thanks. Good-afternoon," said Captain Legh, raising his hat and passing on. But as he went he thought:

"Deceitful little minx! Just like the rest of her sex! She knew perfectly well that Georgie was to sail on the twenty-seventh. I wonder what was her object in trying to mislead me! The twenty-seventh. Well, I think I shall run down to Liverpool to see the last of her! It will look so very bad to outsiders if I am not there!"

CHAPTER X.

THE PARTING.

WHEN it became known in Liverpool that the beautiful and popular actress Miss Harrington was to sail for Amer-

ica in the Cunard steamer on the twenty-seventh of August, there was a great stir among certain circles to do her honor.

The proprietor of the hotel at which her party was to sleep the night before met her at the railway-station with a deputation of gentlemen armed with flowers and fruit, and authorized to ask her and her manager to a dinner at the hotel that same evening.

Georgie was weary and unhappy. She had slept little, and eaten less, for a week past, and felt more inclined to go to bed and cry her heart out, than to sit up with a smiling face to receive the congratulations of her friends.

But there is a penalty attending the life of a public favorite that the envious seldom dream of—the necessity to live for the public, and not for one's self. It would have been impossible for Georgie Harrington to indulge her own feelings on this occasion. She had received many favors from the Liverpool people, and she might live to ask them at their hands again.

At all risks, therefore, she had to accept the invitation extended to her, and, as soon as her trunks were opened, to array herself in a suitable costume, and go down to meet the numerous guests assembled to wish her "God-speed" in the New World.

It was a very wearisome undertaking. She sat on the right-hand of her principal host, smiling faintly as each fresh stranger was presented to bore her with commonplace questions and remarks.

She tried to do her duty in the way of eating, but even the blindest of her entertainers could perceive what an effort it was to her.

And when the dessert was on the table, and the speeches began, and she saw a chance of the banquet coming to an end, Georgie gave a sigh of relief.

Louise Fletcher was on her right hand, and Marian Lacy, who had accompanied her as a guest to Liverpool, sat on her left, and she glanced from one to the other, as though to say:

"Thank Heaven!"

The principal speech was, of course, in her own honor. A *résumé* of what she had already done, with a flattering prophecy of what she had yet to do.

Mr. Seth Maxim rose to reply to it. He said that in

having the good fortune to secure the services of Miss Harrington for the United States of America, he felt certain he had provided a treat for his countrymen which they had seldom enjoyed before. That there was a great deal of native talent in the New World, but it lay more in the direction of comedy than melodrama, and in introducing Miss Harrington to the American stage he was about to place on it a model of what histrionic art should be. The Americans were a warm-hearted, generous people, who recognized talent wherever they saw it, and he was confident that they would receive Miss Harrington with open arms.

Some one at the bottom of the table suggested that that was all very well, so long as the arms remained open, so as to permit Miss Harrington to return to England. Mr. Maxim must not allow his enthusiasm to blind him to the fact that Miss Harrington belonged to England, and they should expect to have her back again.

Mr. Maxim was not so sure of that. He considered it far more likely that their popular favorite would find such a reception awaiting her on the other side the duck-pond as would induce her to take up her abode with them forever.

Georgie shook her head smilingly, as though to deprecate her manager's assertion. The smile gave one of her admirers courage.

"You won't marry in America, will you, Miss Harrington?" he asked, eagerly. "England will never forgive you if you bind yourself for life to any but an Englishman!"

The smile deserted Georgie's lips like the sudden setting of a wintry sun; but Mr. Maxim would not let the remark go unnoticed. He had evidently forgotten what Mr. Brabazon Chauncey had told him in the office.

"I must forbid all tampering with my legal property," he said, jestingly. "It will be the effort of my future life to induce Miss Harrington to remain in America; and if it is to be accomplished through the united efforts of Cupid and Hymen, I shall pray to those two slippery gods every night of my life."

But Georgie had turned so white under the influence of these jokes that Marian Lucy thought she was going to faint.

"Are you ill?" she whispered.

"I am so tired I can hardly hold my head up," was the

reply. "Don't make any fuss about it; but let us get away as soon as we possibly can!"

Her mood, after awhile, communicated itself to the faculties of Mr. Seth Maxim, who, perceiving her fatigue, informed their hosts that he could not permit them to detain her longer, and so she escaped with the other ladies to the privacy of her own room. Marian Lacy accompanied her there, profuse in her expressions of affection, and regret that this would be the last time for so many months that they would be together.

"And I'm afraid you are silly enough to be fretting after that worthless husband of yours, Georgie. I really thought you had more sense."

"Indeed I am *not*!" replied her cousin, her pride alight in a moment. "It is of my own free will I part from him. Why on earth should I regret it?"

"Oh, women generally want a thing directly it is out of their reach," said Marian, lightly. "But you are not an ordinary woman, and it would be almost too *infra dig.* to cry after a man who has treated you as he has. Fancy his not even paying the common civility of seeing you off. Those fellows at table don't even know you're married, from the way they talked of it!"

"I never expected Gerard to see me off, and still less did I desire it," returned Georgie. "In fact, it is all over between us, Marian. We shall never live together again."

"When did you arrive at that decision?"

"It has been growing on me as a necessity for some time past, and I do not see any chance now of resuming our connection! I will never subject Sissy to his violence again! Neither will I live with a man who has entirely ceased to care for me! And his wishes coincide with mine. His last letter tells me so."

"I did not know you had heard from him."

"Yes, I received it the afternoon you all came to see my dresses. It is in my hand-bag. You can read it if you like."

Marian Lacy moved toward the hand-bag; while Georgie continued:

"Lord Kinlock wrote, asking me if I would make my husband an allowance during my stay in America. He said it was my duty to support him. I didn't see it in that light; but I said I would. I fixed the sum at five hundred

pounds. I did not communicate with Gerard personally; but he chose to take it upon himself to answer my proposal. You will be struck by the elegance and good taste of his composition."

Marian opened the letter, and read as follows:

"MADAME,--My father, Lord Kinlock, has communicated to me the substance of your letter to him. I absolutely refuse to be your pensioner. If you choose to alter your plans, and remain at home and submit yourself to my authority, as you are in duty bound to do, I will consent to let things go on as they have done before. But if you insist upon leaving England, I warn you that our parting will be *forever*, and that I shall have no desire to see you again, either in this world or the next. Doubtless, however, Mr. Brabazon Chauncey (whom, I understand, is to see you off at Liverpool), will console you in all your misfortunes.

Yours,

"GERARD LEGH."

" "I will consent to let things go on as they have done before," "repeated Marian, in a fit of laughter, as she concluded reading the letter. "Well, I never thought a man could be capable of such impudence. He will consent, I suppose he means, to abusing you and calling you bad names, and accusing you of all sorts of things you have never done. Georgie, if ever you *do* live with him again you'll have to give up *me*."

"I have told you that my mind is fixed on the subject, Marian. But who can have told him that Mr. Chauncey is going to see me off to-morrow?"

"Is that the case?"

"I believe so. He said he should run down if possible, and what is more natural than that he should do so? He has been my friend and my mother's friend for years, and I repudiate the horrid insinuations Gerard makes against him with scorn. He only does it in order to insult me. He can not even let me go in peace without a final thrust."

"Don't think any more of it, darling," said her cousin, soothingly. "Let me tear this wretched letter up, and forget it was ever written."

"No. Put it back in my hand-bag. I wish to keep it lest I should ever be tempted to forget what I have been subjected to. As for Captain Legh, he can support himself

for the future, or fall back on his aristocratic family, for he has seen the last of my money and of me."

"What shall you do about your house and furniture, dear?" asked Marian, insinuatingly.

"Oh, Gerard can do as he likes with them. I don't wish to pull the roof down over his head. And if at any time you can be of service to him, Marian, don't be afraid of offending me by extending it."

"I do anything for him?" cried Marian, with affected contempt. "No, thank you; I wouldn't touch his hand after the brutal way in which he has treated you! What do you think of me?"

"I think you are a dear good cousin," replied Georgie, affectionately; "but I do not expect every one to view this matter in the same light as myself. And now, dear, I will say good-night to you, for to-morrow will be as fatiguing a day as this has been."

Notwithstanding the letter she had received, and her expressed wish never to see her husband again, Miss Harrington was terribly nervous on the following day, and as they drove to the wharf to go on board the steamer, her eyes kept roving from side to side in the expectation that Captain Legh might relent at the last moment, and not let her leave England without a word of farewell.

But no familiar object met her eye. Cabs full of passengers, and carts full of luggage, tearing down to the wharf at the last moment, amid all the traffic, noise, and bustle of dirty Liverpool, were all she saw; while the number of strangers that attended her progress—the last words of her friends—and the incessant demands of Sissy—kept her thoughts pretty well fixed upon other people.

The tender that was to take them on board the steamer was unusually crowded, and somewhat late; and the moment their party placed foot on her she set forth on her way. Once on the steamer there was no time to be lost. Friends for the shore had barely ten minutes' grace for lamentation, before the bell rang to send them all back to Liverpool. But Mr. Brabazon Chauncey managed to say a few last words to Georgie Harrington.

"Courage, my child," he whispered, as he held her hand in his; "you have a grand future before you. You must make it console you for the past."

"I will try, Mr. Chauncey. And pray don't think I am

unhappy. It is always painful to leave one's native land; but it may not be for long."

"I hope it *may* be for long, Georgie! The best wish I have for you is, that you may find such peace and happiness in America that you may settle there altogether."

"And what will you do without me in England?" she asked, with a smile.

"Ah! that is another question, which I shall solve for myself, by going to New York to see you, if you stay away too long. That is the last bell! I must go! May God bless you, my dear child, in every way!"

And then everybody kissed her or shook hands with her, as they went over the side of the vessel; and she was left on the deck waiting to see the last of them, with Sissy clinging to her arm. They waved their hands to their friends till the tender was a speck in the distance; and then the engines of the Cunard steamer began to rumble, and creak, and turn, and they had commenced their voyage to the New World.

"Look, Georgie!" cried Sissy, suddenly, as she pointed to a little boat, which seemed to be trying to catch up to the steamer. "Isn't the man in that boat like Gerard? Look at him now, standing up. It *is* Gerard! I am sure it is. Oh, I hope he hasn't changed his mind, and is coming with us!"

"Nonsense, Sissy! it is only a boatman," replied Georgie, although the figure indicated by her little sister was certainly very like her husband. "Come down-stairs, dear; it is getting chilly up here, and I want a wrap."

"It's no use going on, sir," said the men in the boat to their solitary passenger, "she's off, for certain."

"Very good," replied Captain Legh, with an uncomfortable sensation in his throat. "Row back to Liverpool."

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE ATLANTIC.

THE first few days on board ship are generally full of discomfort, and the voyage to New York is so quickly accomplished that there is scarcely time to settle down before you find yourself at anchor at Sandy Hook.

Georgie Harrington proved to be an excellent sailor; but

her friend, Mrs. Fletcher, and her little sister were both very ill, and she felt herself bound to minister to their necessities. This sense of duty on her part was the means of her becoming acquainted with an entirely new phase in the character of her bosom friend. She had known Mrs. Fletcher now for some years past, but only while they were living in their separate homes. She had never been thrown in her company on board ship before, nor traveled with her in a railway carriage all night, nor had they been detained together at a friend's house unexpectedly and shared the same room without having access to any of their own possessions. And it is under such circumstances only that it is possible to find out how much of our female friends is false and how much true—how many of their charms have been provided them by nature, and how many they have supplemented by art.

Louise Fletcher had never met Georgie Harrington before without having spent a good hour before her glass, engaged in the mysteries of the toilet. She was an adept in "making up" by daylight, which is a very different thing from "making up" by night, and never admitted another woman to her dressing-room lest she should go forth to the world and disclose the secrets she might discover there. But seasickness is a terrible leveler, and about the only affliction under which the sufferer has no energy left to care what becomes of him.

Mrs. Fletcher, too, was traveling without a maid, partly because she could not well afford to take one, and partly because she depended on sharing the services of Rachel. But Rachel was prostrate as well as her superiors, and "Dickey" (like the selfish sex he belonged to) preferred the fresh sea air on deck to the close atmosphere of his wife's cabin, and so poor Louise had been left to the mercy of the stewardess. She was in a deplorable plight—too ill to rise and look after herself—longing for assistance and companionship, and yet dreading lest any one should see her in her present condition.

It was at this juncture that Georgie's tap sounded on her cabin door. She had heard that Louise had been ill all night, and as soon as her own breakfast was concluded she went to see if she could be of any use to her. But all the answer she received to her demand for admittance was the question, in a muffled voice:

“Who’s there?”

“It is I—Georgie,” answered Miss Harrington. “Let me come in and see what I can do for you, Louise,” and as she spoke she opened the door.

“No, no!” exclaimed Mrs. Fletcher, rolling herself up in the bed-clothes so as to conceal her face. “Go away. I don’t want to see you.”

Georgie was taken aback. Her first idea was that she must unintentionally have offended Louise, and her affectionate heart became all anxiety to know how it had occurred.

“My dearest Louise,” she said, going up to the berth, “do you understand that I am Georgie? What is the matter? The stewardess tells me you have been very ill all night, and I have brought you a bottle of champagne. Do have some. It is the best thing you can take.”

“I would rather not,” replied Mrs. Fletcher, somewhat less irritably, but still without showing her face. “I wish you’d go away, Georgie. The cabin is so close; I can not bear the idea of your remaining in it.”

“Oh! if that is all,” cried the other, cheerfully, “I shall certainly remain with you. What do you suppose I care for the inconvenience of a close cabin when I can be of use to you, Louise? Let me wash your face and hands, dear; it will make you feel so much more comfortable.”

Mrs. Fletcher could not resist the sweet, kind tones of Georgie’s persuasive voice, but she was very disinclined to accept her offices.

“One does look such a *fright* after a night of agony,” she said, at last, as she glanced at her friend with half an eye from under the bed-clothes; “and I’m half afraid, Georgie, that my little bit of hair has tumbled off, for I can’t find it anywhere. You know I only wear the *least* little bit, dear, to save myself the trouble of curling my own; besides, Dickey won’t let me have it cut short—he is so silly about everything that belongs to me—but of course I don’t look myself without it. So I would much rather you’d go away until I am put to rights.”

“Nonsense!” said Georgie. “What is the good of a friend, Louise, if she values you for your looks? I will find the hair for you. Is this it?” she continued, picking up from the cabin-floor what seemed to be an entire wig.

“Oh, yes, that is it!” exclaimed Mrs. Fletcher, snatch-

ing it from her hand and attempting to arrange it on her head. "Oh, dear! where is my hand-glass? This is worse than purgatory. I positively can not find anything."

"Never mind the hand-glass, Louise; there is no one to see you. Sit up and drink this," said Georgie, offering her a glass of foaming champagne.

Mrs. Fletcher made an attempt to rise. She had tried to fix the wig upon her head, but the effect was ludicrous, for her trembling hands had placed it awry, and wisps of gray hair (of which Georgie Harrington had had no previous cognizance) were straying out in all directions. The night of feverish pain which she had passed, too, had rubbed the paint and powder off her face. Even her eyebrows had disappeared beneath the trial, and her false teeth were in the netting basket by the side of her pillow. It was an old face, with a dull yellow complexion lined with many a seam, and colorless lips that looked up plaintively in Georgie Harrington's, and gave the girl almost a shock as she regarded it.

But her better feelings came to her aid, and she attended on the sick woman as affectionately as if she had been a rosy maiden of eighteen.

"I am sure you must think me quite a fright," poor Mrs. Fletcher kept repeating, "but seasickness pulls one down so terribly. It's the most dreadful thing in the world; it takes away one's complexion, and life, and everything."

Georgie's sense of humor made her mentally add: "Yes, and one's teeth and hair into the bargain." But there was no sound of ridicule in the tone with which she answered:

"Of course it does, Louise. My poor little Sissy is as yellow as a guinea this morning! But that will all be remedied as soon as you get into the fresh air. You must make an effort to rise, and you will soon be well again."

"Oh, yes; I certainly will try, for I shall fret myself into a fever if I lie here without any of my little comforts. Dickey might have offered to help me before he went on deck, but he didn't. Men are so selfish! He said he should be sick himself if he stayed another minute down-stairs."

"Some people can not keep up unless they are in the fresh air," replied Georgie, beating a hasty retreat herself to the upper regions.

When there, she could not help thinking, with some dis-

appointment, of the discovery she had made below. Not that it could signify to her if her friend Louise were a few years younger or older, or chose to patch up her faded charms with pigments and false hair. But she felt hurt that she should have thought it necessary to keep the truth so scrupulously from her.

Georgie had been aware, of course, that Mrs. Fletcher used certain artifices by which to heighten the youthfulness of her appearance. She had guessed all her hair was not natural, and she had sometimes had a doubt about her teeth. But Louise had so systematically denied the fact. She had gone so much out of her way to try and convince Georgie that her hair and her teeth were her own, that her friend's suspicions had occasionally been shaken, and she had blamed herself for her ill-natured incredulity. To find therefore that she had been right, and Mrs. Fletcher had not considered her worthy of confidence, was somewhat of a shock to her, and for awhile gave her genuine pain. But she soon shook it off. After all, she thought, it was the sort of thing that no human could be expected to reveal, even to her dearest friend. Louise was none the worse for it—at least in *her* eyes. Her heart was still the same honest, loving, unselfish heart that it had ever been; and what did her little feminine arts and secrets signify, in comparison with that? By the time she had arrived at this conclusion, Georgie could laugh (internally, of course) at the recollection of the wig on the floor—the teeth in the basket—and the yellow face that looked up at her from the pillows, and resolved that she would not so much as remember she had seen them, if it gave her poor old friend a moment's pain.

They had beautiful weather, and in another day both Mrs. Fletcher and Sissy were on deck, and there was no further chance of Georgie's services being required in the cabin.

Her appearance on board had naturally excited a great deal of interest and attention among the passengers, and Mr. Seth Maxim was constantly being asked for introductions to her. But he was very cautious in permitting her to make acquaintances. Georgie would have shaken hands all round, for she had not a particle of affectation or self-consciousness in her nature. But Mr. Maxim reminded her that all these people were going to New York—that

many of them might be located at the same hotel as herself, and their acquaintance—which was all very well on board the steamer—might become a nuisance in the city.

She would be a great person in New York, he added, and must hold herself select in order to keep up her position.

“But there is one person I want to know,” persisted Georgie. “The lady who sits next to you at dinner.”

“Mrs. Lousada-Lorens,” said the manager. “And why do you wish to know her?”

“I like her face, for one thing,” answered Georgie, “I think she is lovely! And I like her way of speaking, and her style altogether. Besides, we often look at one another, and I think she wants to know me.”

“You are right there! She has asked me to introduce her twenty times. She is rich, too, and a leader of fashion. I don’t know that there will be any harm in your knowing her.”

“Why don’t you like her?” asked Georgie.

“Who said I did not?”

“I can guess it from the tone of your voice, Mr. Maxim.”

“You are a dangerous person to talk to, Miss Harrington, in more senses than one,” said the manager, with a very soft inflection of the voice, as he gazed admiringly at her; “but this time you have guessed the truth. I have known Mrs. Lousada-Lorens for some time, yet I do not like her.”

“How strange—when she is so lovely!”

“Pardon me, she is not *lovely*! She is merely handsome. There is no soul beneath her beauty. Poor Lousada could tell you that!”

“Is he her husband?”

“He was her first husband.”

“But you spoke of him in the present.”

“Because he is still living. They were divorced.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Georgie, with an involuntary shudder.

“It is true; but there is no need for you to shrink from her in consequence. Divorces are conducted differently in America from what they are in your country. Mr. and Mrs. Lousada were separated on the plea of non-support.”

“But she is married again?”

“Yes, and legally so. Lousada is a great friend of mine. He settled half his money on his wife, and then

failed in business, and was ruined. So she left him, on the plea of which I have told you, and married Lorens, a rich Jew of New York. She has one of the best houses in the city. She is also very handsome, and can be agreeable when she chooses. And she may be of use to you if you wish to know her. Shall I bring her up to you?"

"I don't know," replied Georgie. "You have made me feel uncomfortable about her! I suppose it is all right in your country, but it seems strange to us at first. And yet, how can a woman do wrong with such a face as that? Yes, Mr. Maxim, I should like to become acquainted with her, whatever she has done."

In a few minutes, therefore, Mrs. Lousada-Lorens and Georgie Harrington were sitting side by side. The lady was very profuse in her compliments, and seemed as well acquainted with what was going on on one side of the globe as the other. She had traveled all over England and the Continent, and was a great admirer of everything foreign to her own country. She proved herself well acquainted with Miss Harrington's favorite rôles, and assured her of a most hearty welcome to America.

"I guess," she observed, after awhile, "that we sha'n't let you get back to England in a hurry. Some of our New York beaus will find you out, and persuade you to make your home amongst us!"

"But I am married," said Georgie, innocently.

Mrs. Lousada-Lorens elevated her eyebrows.

"You don't say! What a pity! And why isn't your husband with you?"

Miss Harrington blushed and stammered:

"It wasn't quite convenient. Gentlemen have their own business, you know, and—"

"I understand, Miss Harrington," replied her new acquaintance, with a significant look; "and women have their own business too, sometimes. Well, you take my advice, and don't mention him in New York. Drop the husband altogether, and you'll find it the better for yourself."

"Of course I shall not obtrude my domestic affairs on the notice of strangers; but I should never think of denying them," said Georgie, somewhat indignantly.

"They won't think any the more of you for being married, my dear, and they may think a great deal the less. We don't reckon much of married ladies who work for

their living over there. It's the men's business to support us, and we consider a woman mean who forgets it. If you are wise, you'll keep your own counsel."

"Perhaps you are right," said Georgie, sadly.

"I know I am. The fault of women is that they're too unselfish. I saw that at once, and I resolved to correct it. I used to live for others at one time, but I live for myself now. I always keep four letters written up in the air before me—S E L F—and I've been much the happier for it."

"That is an unusual doctrine," remarked Georgie, smiling.

"Because the majority follow the old creeds, my dear, which are mostly wind, and never think of making a new one for themselves. But I shape my life according to my experience, and my experience has taught me to love myself better than my neighbor. I get some reward for loving myself. People jump around when they see me coming. They know I won't stand any nonsense. But I can't remember that my neighbor ever showed any gratitude for what I did for him."

"It is true, perhaps," replied Georgie; "but it sounds very terrible! Never to have any one to live for you and love you!"

"Didn't I just say you have yourself, Miss Harrington? and you may lay your bottom dollar that yourself will love yourself better than any one else will ever love you. But it is getting late. I guess the dinner-bell will soon ring. Well, I shall hope to see you at my house in New York, and to introduce you to some of our leading citizens before long."

But, notwithstanding her lovely face and figure, and her own genuine admiration of them, Georgie Harrington did not feel at that moment as if she would care to see much more of Mrs. Lousada-Lorens.

CHAPTER XII.

NEW FACES.

It was a beautiful summer's day when they landed in New York, and Georgie fell in love with the city at first sight. The happy combination of British solidity with

Parisian gayety that pervaded its broad avenues and handsome streets struck her fancy at once, and her spirits, which had been very much depressed till now, rose with the change of scene and atmosphere, and the novelty by which she was surrounded. There are some natures that can not grieve without injury to themselves, and Georgie Harrington, with her supersensitive and finely organized temperament, would have broken down under a prolonged strain. Besides, her recollections of her husband were so fraught with wounded pride and a sense of injury to herself, that she put them from her resolutely whenever they arose, and thought, so checked, must become gradually more indistinct.

The retrospect of her married life was like a half-healed wound that it hurt her to touch; her desire was never to lay a hand on it again; and she could not have found a better help to healing than the journey she had undertaken. Everything was so bright and fresh in New York—everybody was so complimentary and genial. The profession bowed down before her, and private houses threw open their portals at her approach. Her health was excellent—she had plenty of lucrative work to fill up her time—and Louise Fletcher and Sissy contributed to keep her home bright. What wonder was it, then, if in a short time Georgie had almost persuaded herself that she had never known what it was really *to live* until now!

Mr. Maxim had established her in a suite of rooms in one of the principal hotels of the city; and on Mr. Fletcher leaving New York for the West with a traveling company Louise took up her residence with her friend.

Georgie was rather surprised at first that Mrs. Fletcher did not go with her husband, as the journeys were easy ones (for America), and he was only to play at the principal towns.

“It would be such a splendid opportunity to see the country,” she said, when discussing the subject.

But Louise did not see it in the same light. She always spoke in such an effusive manner of her “darling Dickey,” that she led her hearers to believe she would not part with him for a day; but when it came to a question of leaving New York, she clung in a girlish fashion to Georgie, and declared she could not go. So Mr. Fletcher (apparently

little loath) left his wife behind him, and set forth on his travels alone.

Georgie was very glad of her friend's company. It was charming, when she got back to the hotel after a fatiguing rehearsal, to find Louise ready to accompany her out, or to spend the evening quietly by her side.

There is no companionship more delightful than that between two women who agree with one another. It is not necessary that they should both be intellectual, or have the same tastes or acquaintances. All that is required is sympathy with each other's troubles, and a spirit of non-interference with each other's joys. Granted these conditions, such a friendship is almost perfect.) The irritating causes of jealousy, or doubt, or suspicion, that so often mar the serenity of an affection between the sexes, have no place in it, and there is less formality or *queue* about feminine intercourse—less anxiety.

Mrs. Fletcher was an excellent listener. She could talk freely, too, on subjects that interested her; and she was full of anecdotes of her past life and conquests. By her own account every man who had ever seen her had fallen in love with her; and she was not yet cured of the notion that many were still hopelessly miserable because she had bestowed her hand on Dickey.

Georgie used to listen to these confidences, and laugh over them, never dreaming that Louise (even if she desired it) could find any one in the present willing to flirt with her. She was very busy with rehearsals for the first month she spent in New York, and had little time to think of anything but her appearance before an American audience, which she was to make in an Anglicized version of "Diane de Lys." She was naturally very anxious, if not nervous, about it; and while she listened to Louise's confidences had really no time to think of any one but herself.

Invitations poured in upon her, but she resolutely declined all hospitality until the ordeal was over. One person, however, she saw much of, and liked better as their acquaintance increased—Mrs. Lousada-Lorens. There was an originality about this lady, and a genuineness in speaking of her own affairs that interested Georgie. Where there was no concealment, she argued, there could be nothing wrong.

Mrs. Lousada-Lorens had a magnificent house in Fifth

Avenue. She drove the best carriage horses in New York, and wore the finest diamonds, and had, doubtless, in building her nest for the second time, taken care to feather it well.

Mr. Samuel Lorens, her husband, was an ugly little man of middle age, who adored his wife, and let her do exactly as she chose. And her choice was to be so hospitable and friendly, that it was difficult to resist her overtures. The only thing that Georgie refused to accept at her hands was a party to be given in her honor, before she had made her public appearance in New York.

It was decided, therefore, that the invitations were to be sent out for a supper on the night of her *début*, to be given directly the performance was over.

A few days beforehand Georgie was sauntering down Broadway with her new friend, when they encountered a tall, handsome man upon the pavement.

"Will you forgive me?" asked Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, insinuatingly, of Miss Harrington, as she stopped to speak to him.

"Well, Gustav," she said, in a cordial tone, as they shook hands, "what brings you to the city? I thought you were in San Francisco."

"I have only returned from it a week," replied the gentleman. "And I, for my part, believed you to be in Europe. Your last letter said you would remain till Christmas."

"True; but I got tired of it. You know how soon I get tired of everything!"

"I do know it, to my cost," he answered, with a grave smile. "But I am keeping you from your friend."

"Let me introduce you, then. Miss Harrington, will you allow me to present Mr. Gustav Lousada?"

The stranger bowed, made some commonplace remarks, and passed on.

"He is handsome, isn't he?" inquired Mrs. Lousada-Lorens of Georgie.

"He is a very striking-looking man," she answered. "One of your connections, I suppose?"

"My dear, he is my husband—at least, he *was* my husband, you know, before I married Mr. Lorens!"

Georgie looked considerably surprised.

"Ah, I suppose you think it curious I should still be

friendly with him? But why should I not? We never quarreled. I merely left him because he couldn't support me. He's an elegant fellow when you know him; but he won't work, and marriage is no good without money! It was a real pity, and, to tell you the truth, I often regret it. No one but a woman knows what it is to part with her first love. If he had only had Mr. Lorens's fortune. But it is no use thinking of it," concluded Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, with a deep sigh.

"It seems very, *very* strange to me," observed Georgie, half inclined to laugh.

"I dare say it does. The old country is so behind in everything. It doesn't know how to make people happy and good at the same time. But it wouldn't go down with Americans. We don't care to be tied to a man if we can't get along with him. We think it's better to part right away. And there wouldn't be so many miserable marriages in Europe if you'd follow our plan."

"I think you are right there," said Georgie, as she thought of her own ill-fated marriage, and the wide separation there was between herself and her husband now.

"But I suppose," she continued, hesitatingly—"I suppose you don't ask Mr. Lousada to your parties, do you?"

"No, my dear; I draw the line there. It might be awkward, as so many of my old friends still meet at my house. Not but what I believe Mr. Lorens would receive him. Lorens is a good creature—quite devoted to me, and willing to fall in with all my whims. But it wouldn't do for me to encourage Lousada too much. He might get into a way of lounging about the house, and I am very careful of my reputation. Poor Lousada was always a loungeur. It's the sort of work that suits him. Dear, dear! it seems ten thousand pities that a man with such a face should have no money!"

"Had he money when you married him?" asked Georgie.

"Oh, dear, yes. How could we marry without it? But he speculated too much, my dear, and knew too little. That was where the mistake lay; and one day we woke up to find we were beggars. So I went home to my own people, and sued him for a divorce on the plea of non-support. It was the only thing left me to do. It was very sad, but it was necessary. Sometimes I feel as if I hadn't got over it yet."

“But that is hardly fair to Mr. Lorens.”

“Poor dear Lorens! Yes; he would say that was an ungrateful speech on my part. And indeed I am perfectly contented with my lot. Have you seen my new pair of phaeton cobs, dear? They came up from Kentucky yesterday. A birthday present from my husband. Oh, I’m a very lucky woman, there’s no doubt of that.”

And the speaker’s lovely face, with its delicate features and pink and white china complexion, looked so thoroughly honest as she spoke the words that there was no doubt she believed in them.

The eventful evening for Georgie’s first appearance arrived, and she went to the theater in a state of excitement which kept all her nerves quivering like a stringed instrument beneath the bow. She was so irritable that the slamming of a door upset her; so impatient that the knotting of a ribbon made her dance; so anxious that her cheek paled and flushed by turns, and her heart throbbed audibly, as each moment brought the time nearer for her to step upon the stage. At last she was ready; at last the overture was ended, and she stood at the wings with strained eyes and clasped hands waiting for her cue. Mr. Maxim approached her with a look of admiration.

“Courage!” he exclaimed. “You have the finest audience in New York waiting to receive you with acclamation.”

“Oh! Mr. Maxim, I hope they won’t applaud me before I have done anything to deserve it.”

“You silly girl! do you suppose your fame has not preceded you? Why, there is not a man, woman, or child, seated in front who could not repeat every bit of your history that has been made known to the public. They will receive you as a friend, and take your talent on trust.”

He did not exaggerate; for, when the curtain rose, and she appeared before them, she was greeted with a deafening welcome that would have given any artist courage to proceed.

The warmth of her reception overcame her for a moment, but as it subsided her energy returned, and she threw herself heart and soul into the work before her.

Never had she interpreted the sad story of the love of Diana de Lys with greater pathos—never risen to the occasion more sublimely, nor with greater dignity.

And when, in the last scene of all, she threw herself between her husband and her lover, and received the ball in her own breast which was intended for his, the enthusiasm of her audience knew no bounds.

Flowers were thrown upon the stage until it was carpeted with them—huge floral trophies, tied with the British colors, were handed over the foot-lights—the people rose *en masse* to cheer her, and the success of the new actress was established.

Mr. Maxim led her on to receive their renewed congratulations, in a fever of delight, which he made no attempt to conceal. He had played a bold card, and it had turned up trumps. He had every reason to congratulate himself.

Georgie retreated to her dressing-room, worn out by the excitement of the evening. But she was not to rest there. She had to proceed to Mrs. Lousada-Lorens's supper.

A delicate robe of the palest French pink, trimmed profusely with lace, was waiting for her to put on, and Mrs. Fletcher was ready to accompany her. So she dressed wearily, and dragged herself down to the carriage.

As she entered the drawing-room of Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, a low murmur of admiration greeted her arrival. She looked like a lovely blush-rose in her delicate robe, with her fair face flushed by all she had gone through, and by finding herself the queen of the evening. She was taken possession of at once, and placed on a sofa, while everybody in the room hurried to beg for an introduction to her.

"Is all New York here to-night?" she managed to whisper to her hostess, who sat beside her. Mrs. Lousada-Lorens laughed.

"Not more than two hundred of them, but I believe some of them are coming up twice. They can't be satisfied with only one look at you. And I don't wonder at it, my dear, for you are real handsome! I want to introduce Mr. Hiram Boch to you though. He is dying to know you, but unlike most men he is rather shy. You'll admire him, I am sure."

"*Hiram Boch!*" repeated Georgie. "What an extraordinary name! I couldn't imagine any one good-looking who owned it. Who is Mr. Hiram Boch?"

"Well, he's just the handsomest, and richest, and most elegant man in the city. You won't think twice of his name when you've once seen him. And he has a head on

his shoulders, too, you bet. Ah, there he is, coming through the door-way. I'll fetch him to you right away."

And Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, starting in search of her friend, returned in another moment to introduce to Georgie Harrington the very handsomest man she had ever seen in her life.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RUPTURE.

THERE are occasional exceptions to the rule that a mixture of race is not desirable, and Mr. Hiram Boch was a brilliant example of the fact. Born of a German father and a Spanish mother, he had inherited all the vitality, grand *physiquè*, and muscular strength of the Northern people with the beauty and softness of the natives of Spain.

He possessed a magnificent figure, tall and well-built, and a face of remarkable charm. His complexion was olive; he had long, dark, half-shut eyes, with a searching glance in them which penetrated to the very soul of those he looked upon—a perfect nose, and a mouth which was too well cut to be covered with a silky black mustache.

In fact, it would be difficult to say where Mr. Boch's physical proportions failed. He was the possessor also of a very sweet-toned voice, and was an adept in the great art of conversation. Before Georgie had heard him speak for five minutes she had forgotten all about his ridiculous name, or, if she had remembered it, would have told you that, as it was so singular, it just fitted him, who was, without doubt, the most remarkable man she had ever met in private life.

She did not find him shy, as Mrs. Lousada-Lorens had affirmed, but she thought he was far more modest than the generality of his sex, considering the superior advantages he boasted of. It was only by little and little, as he bent over her, that she discovered that he had traveled far and wide—had visited, indeed, almost every quarter of the globe, and seen everything that was worth seeing.

His knowledge of the drama and the modern professors of histrionic art was so extensive, that she was tempted at first to ask him if he was connected with the stage. He had seen Regnier and Lefevre, Rachel, Judic, and Bern-

hardt, and was perfectly familiar with Irving, Terry, Barrett, Toole, and all the latter-day lights of London.

He had evidently read deeply both in French and English, and had studied in the school of unacted dramas as well as in that which had been presented to the public. He had seen the lamented Aimée Decles in "*Diane de Lys*," and, without open flattery, drew so delicate a comparison between her work and that of the star that had just risen on New York, as really to impart knowledge whilst he disclaimed the possibility of any improvement.

Miss Harrington was as charmed by his ability as he appeared to be by hers. She had met no one in the country yet who had so greatly impressed her as Mr. Hiram Boch, and she was puzzled to guess his position, or the means by which he had acquired his extent of knowledge. He certainly was not an actor. The stage is not held in the same estimation in America that it is in England. Very few gentlemen step upon it, and no women in the position of ladies.

Parents would rather, as a rule, see their sons serving in stores, and their daughters doing house-work, than engaged in so equivocal a profession. And Mr. Boch looked like a man of fashion and standing. He had the air, too, of one who is accustomed to the best society, and feels at home there.

He paid Georgie very few compliments, and those very delicate ones, upon her acting, but his eyes and manner told her how he had been moved by it.

After a long conversation he left her side to make room for others, but not before he had asked permission to call on her. Georgie accorded it willingly. She liked her new acquaintance so much she quite longed to see more of him. As he made his final adieus, and passed out of sight, she turned eagerly to her hostess:

"My dear Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, what a charming man Mr. Boch is; I don't remember when I have enjoyed a conversation so much before. He seems to know everybody, and to have seen everything. What is he? Do tell me!"

"Why, my dear, he's just Hiram Boch, and about the richest man in the city—that's all! His father was a millionaire, and Hiram was the only child, and came in for every cent of it. He does nothing for his living, but he's just the busiest man amongst us. He's dead on yachting

for one thing, and spends half his time on the water. Then he has a magnificent stud—his horses win all the races in this country. He travels a great deal, too. In fact, it's hard to say what he does *not do*."

"He is a most delightful companion," said Georgie; "he asked leave to call on me, and I gave it him. I should like to see some more of Mr. Boch."

"Notwithstanding his 'extraordinary name!' " said her friend slyly.

"Oh, I forgot everything about his name directly he began to talk to me. And after all, it suits him exactly. Is he married?"

"*Married!* No! He's a great deal too wise to marry. What should a man like that want a wife for? He has nothing on earth to do but amuse himself."

"Well, I shall like him better as he is," replied Georgie. "He is a man to make a friend of; and that becomes difficult when there is a wife in the way."

"You are right, *ma chère*," cried Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, laughing, "and if I am not much mistaken, Mr. Boch will be quite ready to make friends with you."

Georgie had not seen the last of Mr. Boch that evening, for when she rose to go home she found him waiting in the vestibule, to wrap her cloak about her, and hand her to the carriage, and remind her once more that she had given him leave to call upon her, and he should have the honor to present himself at the hotel at a very early date.

"What a handsome fellow!" exclaimed Mrs. Fletcher, as they drove away; "where did you pick him up, Georgie?"

Louise had occasionally a coarse way of putting things, especially when she spoke of men, that grated on Georgie Harrington, and she answered, rather coldly:

"He was introduced to me during the evening. Where else could I have 'picked him up,' as you express it, Louise?"

"Well, you needn't be testy, my dear. He seemed to me to spring from nowhere. I am glad he is going to call upon us. I must say I do like a handsome man, though I wouldn't let my Dickey hear me say so. By the way, Georgie, did you see that young, fair fellow, who was by my side all the evening?"

"No; you sat quite out of my sight."

"His name is Charlie Randall. He is a young English-

man, settled out here. Such a ridiculous boy! Really, one would think, to hear him talk, I was the only woman he had ever seen."

"Is he so smitten, then?" asked Georgie, with a smile.

"*Smitten!* my dear child! Smitten is no word for it! He talks as if he was crazy."

"Then I should snub him, Louise, if I were you. It is no compliment for a man to talk to a woman in that fashion, the first time he meets her."

"The first time! My dear Georgie, what are you thinking of? I met Mr. Randall dozens of times in England. He was a friend of Dickey's."

"Oh! I beg your pardon! I have not heard you mention him before. He can not be worth much, however, from what you say."

"I don't understand you," replied Mrs. Fletcher, somewhat huffily.

"I mean that the sort of talk you allude to is no mark of friendship. On the contrary, I should call it great impertinence, especially from a boy to a woman of your age."

"Oh, you take everything too much *au pied de la lettre*, Georgie! Of course I was only jesting. And I should be sorry to prejudice you against Charlie Randall; for I hope to see a good deal of him whilst I am here, for dear Dickey's sake. And it would be very unpleasant if you took a dislike to him."

"I am not likely to do that. You know I seldom even notice boys; I don't care enough for them."

"He is *not* a boy," replied Louise, contradicting herself. "He is six-and-twenty. Quite as old, I should think, as your Mr. Boch!"

Georgie did not answer; she did not like the tone the conversation was taking, and she would not trust herself to reply. She had reason, however, to remember it many times afterward, for Mr. Charlie Randall soon became a standing dish at the hotel.

Her suite consisted of three bedrooms (one of which she had given up to Louise), and a sitting-room; and it was vexatious, when she returned from the theater, tired out, and only anxious to eat her supper and go to bed, to find this young man, night after night, sitting with Mrs. Fletcher until the small hours of the morning. With his appearance all the pleasant communion she had enjoyed with her

friend vanished. Louise was no longer ready to sit down quietly and eat her little supper with her—to listen to her confidences and impart her own. She was always dressed in an absurd fashion for an evening at home, with her false hair, and her rouge, and her powder well laid on, either sitting at the piano, and warbling ballads in a cracked voice, whilst Charlie Randall hung over the instrument, or lounging on the sofa, with the young man by her side, whispering and tittering behind her fan.

At first Georgie Harrington mistook her friend's interest in Mr. Randall for a purely maternal one. Notwithstanding the frivolous conversation and the affectation of Mrs. Fletcher, she did not think it possible she could seriously believe him to be in love with her. But after awhile she could not help perceiving, not only that Louise credited the fact, but that she encouraged the idea.

The discovery made Georgie angry, for the sake of Mr. Fletcher as well as for that of Louise. It was degrading to think that, whilst he was working hard in the West, his wife (who professed so much affection for him) should be carrying on a senseless flirtation with a young fellow half her own age in New York. So Georgie resolved to speak to her—the most honest perhaps, but decidedly the most ill-advised thing she could possibly do.

If women wish to continue friends, they should never interfere with each other's dealings with the opposite sex. But Georgie's patience was wearing out. She had tried hints without avail. She had asked Louise privately to let Mr. Randall know that the afternoon was a more convenient time for calling than the evening; but Mrs. Fletcher said she could not do that, because he was always employed in the afternoon.

“What is his occupation, then?” demanded Georgie.

“He is a clerk in a publishing office.”

“Has he no friends in the city? Whom does he live with?”

“He is quite alone, poor fellow, and lives in a boarding-house.”

“Well, I should think he can not live here so long without having friends to go to beside ourselves. He seems to me to be here every evening.”

“Oh, not every evening, Georgie! I have not seen him since Thursday till to-night!”

"And this is Saturday," observed Miss Harrington.

"Really, I think you are very inhospitable to count the days in this way. And Mr. Boch has been here twice this week also."

Georgie blushed. She had begun already to think that Mr. Hiram Boch called oftener than was necessary. But she would not betray herself to Louise.

"I don't see what Mr. Boch's visits have to do with the matter. He does not drop in night after night to supper without any invitation, and make as free with our rooms as if they were his own. And that is not all, Louise. I am aware that Mr. Randall often remains here long after I have gone to bed; and the servants talk of it. Indeed it must be put a stop to!"

Mrs. Fletcher grew as red as her cosmetics would allow her to do with indignation.

"I never heard of such a thing!" she exclaimed. "I had no idea when I consented to share your rooms that I should not be allowed to see my own friends as often as I chose. I had better be in a prison at once. You seem to forget that whilst you are enjoying yourself at the theater, and flirting with whom you like, I am cooped up in this hotel, without a soul to speak to! I suppose you expected me to make a companion of that child Sissy!"

"You know I never expected anything of the sort," answered Georgie, gravely; "nor did I think that you would not make friends for yourself in the city; but surely you might find a more congenial companion than this young man. I won't allude to your ungenerous remark about my flirting at the theater, for you know it is untrue. I do not profess the same attachment for my husband that you do for yours; but I have too much respect for myself to forget that I am married. And that is what I am afraid you do not remember as often as you should, Louise."

At this reproof, gently as it was administered, Mrs. Fletcher's temper displayed itself as it had never done to Georgie Harrington before.

"You are a very nice person to remind me of my duty!" she exclaimed, angrily; "*you*, who have left your own husband to starve in England so that you might come out to gratify your insatiable vanity in this country."

At this rude thrust Georgie grew suddenly pale.

"Do you *mean* that, Louise?" she asked, quietly.

"Yes, I *do* mean it, Mrs. Legh! I have stood up for you, and been your friend for years, and allowed no one to abuse you in my presence; but if this is to be my reward you had better know the truth at once. Every one (but me) has blamed you for your behavior to poor Captain Legh. There was not a dissentient voice on the matter. And, therefore, you are the last person in the world, in my opinion, who should presume to take me to task, and accuse me of not doing my duty to poor Dickey!"

"If that is indeed your opinion of me," replied Georgie, sadly, "it is time that we should part. I thought you were truer to me, Louise; I thought you spoke your real mind when you appeared to sympathize with the course of action I had taken; but since it is not so, it is better this close intimacy of ours should cease. Without mutual confidence it has lost its charm. I shall always remember how long I thought you true to me; but I could not live with a person who distrusted me; and you will be freer, too, to entertain your own friends when we are apart."

This was a consequence which Mrs. Fletcher had not anticipated, and it was not a welcome one. To live in New York with Miss Harrington, who had taken the city by storm, and was becoming rapidly acquainted with the best people in it, was a very different thing from living in New York alone, with no claim upon society. She began to wish she had accompanied Mr. Fletcher to the West. But it was too late for that now; so she took refuge in an apparent acquiescence.

"Certainly; I quite agree with you. I certainly could not consent to be coerced and restrained in this manner. I am not a child, Georgie!"

"I know you are not, Louise."

"And I can not submit to be told what is right and what is wrong; and so I will take your hint, and we will have separate rooms from to-morrow."

Georgie shed a few tears over this rupture. It is so painful to have to acknowledge that the friend in whom we have trusted is untrue. It makes us feel as if we had scattered our treasure broadcast, for the wind to carry where it may list. Notwithstanding which, she felt easier when Louise had taken her departure. The responsibility of her friend's vagaries was lifted from her shoulders, and the peace that ensued was very evident.

Georgie felt at that moment that it would have been better if she had elected from the first to live her new life with only Sissy for her companion.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PRACTICAL WOMAN.

As soon as Mrs. Lousada-Lorens found that Mrs. Fletcher had parted company from Georgie Harrington she invited the latter to take up her residence in her house.

Georgie objected on a dozen scores. The late hours she was compelled to keep—the irregularity of her movements—the presence of Sissy and Rachel.

But Mrs. Lousada-Lorens bore all her objections to the ground, and became quite affectionate with the amount of pressure she put upon her.

“You see, I’ve taken a real liking to you,” she argued, “and it will be a favor if you will come and help fill my big, lonely house. Lorens is half his time out west, and I’m left too much to myself.”

“But you must have so many friends,” commenced Georgie.

“No, Miss Harrington, I haven’t! I’m not fond of my own sex as a rule, and the other is too dangerous. You’re about the only woman I ever took a fancy to, or thought I could live with. Now—if you’ll forgive my saying so—I didn’t like your friend; there was a false ring about her I detected at once.”

“And yet Louise has been a good friend to me for years past, notwithstanding our little difference,” said Georgie, sighing.

“My dear, you’re too good yourself; that’s what’s the matter. You take people too much on trust, and—if you won’t be offended—you tell them a great deal too much of your own affairs. That is a terrible mistake. You should listen to all you hear, and tell nothing in return. It’s the only way to get on in this world.”

“But then we should have no sympathy—no comfort in our troubles,” cried Georgie, plaintively. “How should we bear them, Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, without the affection of our friends?”

"*Sympathy?* Pooh! my dear, it's curiosity, that's all! You tell another woman what you think, and feel, and have done, and she listens with open mouth, and repeats it with her own embellishments to the next person she sees. Now, I've been very lucky in this world, and I attribute it entirely to the reason that I'm an excellent listener, but directly people try to get anything out of me I shut up like a clam! What's the use of telling your troubles to your friends? Do you think they care for them? Not they! Each one cares only for his own distresses, and to remedy them he would walk over his friends' graves!"

"That is a very sad doctrine, Mrs. Lousada-Lorens!"

"It's a true one, Miss Harrington, as you will acknowledge when you grow older. People say I'm a cold woman. Well, perhaps I am; but it's the world that has made me so. There was a time when I, too, sought solace for my griefs in the confidence of my fellow-creatures. And how did they repay me? Scattered my most holy secrets to the winds, and then declared they had never repeated them! But women will say anything, my dear! I suppose you have found *that* out?"

"I know that the majority of them are very deceitful," said Georgie.

"Yes; and the majority is a large one. I think it must be because you have such an ingenuous face, and are such a child for a woman of your age, that I want to know more of you. Now, will you bring your boxes over to my house, and settle down there for as long as you like, or not?"

"You ask me so generously that I don't know how to refuse," replied Georgie. "So I will come, at least for a few weeks, or till I see you are tired of me."

"You'll see it soon enough if it comes to pass," replied Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, bluntly, "for I don't hide my feelings under a bushel. I'm not one of those women who will kiss you all day and call you 'darling,' and then turn round and tell the next comer that you have an execrable temper. I'm not demonstrative by any manner of means; but people soon see if I like them or not. And mind one thing. I don't wish to force your confidence; but if you ever *do* tell me anything, I shall be secret as the grave. I pride myself on the fact that no one, not even an enemy, has ever suffered through my love of tattling. For to tell you the truth I do not feel sufficient interest in any one to

care to talk about them. I can find more enlivening topics in my own brain."

"I believe you make yourself out to be much worse than you are," said Georgie.

"Indeed I do not. I tell you the simple truth. I like you vastly; but I love only myself. There may have been a time when I did otherwise, but I found it didn't pay. I'm an excellent wife; but I don't love my husband, and he knows it. That is what keeps him so devoted to me. Men never care for what they are sure of. Without the excitement of uncertainty their love soon fails. Women have generally to thank themselves for an unhappy marriage."

"Do you really think so?" exclaimed Georgie.

"I am sure of it. They let their husbands see that they are entirely theirs—that there is nothing more to strive for—and the men lay down their arms in consequence. The very means they choose by which to show their affection renders it valueless. There is nothing like keeping a man off, and letting him see that he can not have it all his own way!"

"It is so difficult when you like a man," said Georgie.

"Not at all, if you school yourself to it. I've had two of the best husbands in the world quite devoted to me, and I've been a mystery to each of them; but then I began as I intended to go on. They were my slaves during the days of courtship, and I took care never to change places with them. Consequently they both admire me to this day, and Lousada would come back to me to-morrow if he could. He often tells me he has never met my equal since we parted."

"I can't think how you *could* have parted with him so easily!" exclaimed Georgie.

"Ah, my dear Miss Harrington, if I had been so foolish as to follow the dictates of my heart I should not have done so perhaps; but my practical wisdom stepped in to save me. I argued that neither his love nor mine could survive the blighting breath of poverty, and, therefore, it was wiser to part whilst we had something to regret. You can see how successful my argument has been. Mr. Lousada meets me to-day with all the warmth of an old friend, and we maintain a real interest in each other. Is that not better than fighting and quarreling, and separat-

ing with anger and malice in our hearts? But what have I said to upset you, dear Miss Harrington? Surely it is not I who have brought those tears into your eyes?"

"It is not your fault, indeed," stammered Georgie. "But perhaps you have guessed my own marriage has not been quite a happy one, and your words make me think of it."

"Ah, it is not an uncommon case in the old country, is it? There are a great many miserable marriages there. Your women are not worldly enough; they sit down and cry when they ought to act. You won't find the Americans so soft. If the knot galls them they untie it; and if it can't be untied it can be cut. What would become of all business if partnership were indissoluble?"

"But it is impossible to look upon marriage as a civil contract only," said Georgie.

"That's just the mistake you make in Europe, Miss Harrington, not to regard it as a matter of business. What more can it be between two people who hardly know each other? It's the business of life, and it's no good thinking of it as a union of angels. There are no angels living in the nineteenth century—there are only men and women—and if we don't want to fail we must protect ourselves against them!"

"I feel you are right from a practical point of view, Mrs. Lousada-Lorens; but the theory is a hard one. It pulls down all one's faith in one's fellow-creatures."

"Have you any faith left in them, then?"

"Not much, I am afraid."

"Just so; and the older you grow the less you will have. The best thing you can do is to forget you ever cherished it, and enjoy yourself as much as you can in the present. When may I expect to see you at my house?"

"I am ready at any time, since you are good enough to wish to have me."

"Then I shall come round and fetch you to-morrow, in time for luncheon."

At the appointed hour Mrs. Lousada-Lorens appeared, and conveyed Georgie to her house, where she was lodged in a suite of rooms fit for a princess. She knew that the Lorens lived in the best style, but was not prepared for the magnificence that surrounded her.

Mrs. Lousada-Lorens loaded her with presents and with

luxuries, gave large parties in her honor, and seemed never better pleased than when she was listening to her conversation; and yet, with all her goodness, they seemed to draw no nearer to each other.

Her hostess was bright and generous, and amiable as could be, but she reposed no confidences in Georgie, and she asked for none. She was quite lost sometimes in admiration of her guest's talent, both on and off the stage, but she never gave vent to her feelings in a kiss of congratulation.

She was different from any woman that Georgie had ever met before, and that was perhaps the secret of her liking for her.

She kept an open house, and her salons were crowded with men of business, fashion, and letters—many of whom clustered round Mrs. Lousada-Lorens like flies about a honey-pot; for this woman, with her lovely, though inanimate features, her fine figure, and fashionable dress, was a very attractive object to most of her visitors, and some were eager to try if they could not call something more than a frosty smile upon her face.

But she was equally indifferent to all. She was never rude, but she was never more than polite. Admiration held no danger for her, because she had no value for it.

One day, when Georgie was jesting about the number of adorers she possessed, and wondering that Mr. Lorens was not jealous of their attentions, she cut her very short:

“My dear Miss Harrington, Mr. Lorens knows me better than you do. He would tell you that the whole of New York might be at my feet without exciting the least alarm in his mind. There is no credit due to me for it. I like to hear them talk, and to number them amongst my friends; but nothing more.”

There was a fascination for Georgie about Mrs. Lousada-Lorens that she could not resist, and unconsciously she began to imbibe some of her unorthodox opinions, and to question whether her own misfortunes were not due to her having shown too much heart, instead of too little.

We have always reached a dangerous stage of self-argument when we think we have been too good and lenient toward the faults of our fellow-creatures.

In rating our powers of forgiveness too high, we run the risk of believing we are in no need of forgiveness our-

selves; and Georgie had no true friend near her at that moment to keep her humble. She was surrounded by praise and flattery.

Public and private opinion combined to raise, rather than depress, her bump of self-appreciation. The press lauded her efforts to the skies, and she gained fresh admirers every day. Not the least amongst them was Mr. Hiram Boch.

He had unlimited means at his command wherewith to gild his friendship, but he used them with so much delicacy that Georgie scarcely guessed they were expended for her benefit alone.

When he inaugurated a magnificent feast at Delmonico's, and invited a host of his acquaintances to meet Mrs. Lousada-Lorens and herself, she was not supposed to know that the banquet cost four times the money it need have done because it was given in her favor.

When she accepted his offer to lend her a horse and accompany her out riding, no one told her that the steed that carried her was an Arab palfrey that Mr. Boch had bought expressly for the occasion. But New York knew it.

The young American seemed to have taken a great fancy to her little sister, and this was a plane on which Georgie could meet his advances with perfect propriety.

How could she but be grateful for the pleasure he gave to Sissy: the baskets of bonbons he lavished on her, the interest he took in her childish chatter, her likes and dislikes, her pets and playthings.

Sissy thought Mr. Hiram Boch quite the most delightful friend that she had ever made, and it was a settled thing between them that when the warm weather came they were to be married and go to Saratoga.

The elder sister laughed at her vagaries and was happy in her pleasures, and thought, if Sissy were only a few years older, what a very nice arrangement it would be. She never seemed to notice that whilst Mr. Boch was talking to the little girl he was gazing at her, or that he looked more pleased at a word of thanks from her lips than at all the child's effusive gratitude.

And so the days wore away, and brought the one that was to undeceive her.

CHAPTER XV.

A TERRIBLE MISTAKE.

GEORGIE HARRINGTON had now been some months in America. The beautiful autumn had given place to winter, which was now fast turning into spring. And yet "Diane de Lys" still held the boards, and Mr. Maxim's theater was crowded nightly with an enthusiastic audience.

Never had an English actress made such a sensation in New York before, nor met with so warm and generous a reception. Her manager rubbed his hands over his receipts, and was determined that the second venture should exceed the first in popularity. It was now in active course of preparation. Every day was spent at rehearsal, and Georgie had no time to attend to anything but her business.

She had not received a line from her husband since leaving England, nor had she written to him. His last letter had wounded her pride so terribly that she felt hard and cold when she thought of him. If he chose to refuse her offer of assistance, she said to herself, he might get on as best he could. Doubtless his aristocratic family would not permit him to starve, and if they let him feel the sting of poverty, he might learn better to appreciate what he had cast away so lightly.

She thought of him oftener than she would have liked to confess, but her thoughts had no love in them, or she persuaded herself that it was so. And they were known to her own heart only, for she seldom mentioned Captain Legh's name.

Once or twice she had timidly approached the subject with Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, but that lady's strictures on her weakness, in even thinking of such a man, were so severe that Georgie did not venture to broach it again; and since it could not be remedied it was better not discussed. She had quite made up her mind that she and Gerard would never live together again, and had almost decided to take up her residence in New York. She could not live in England (so she told herself) while matters continued as they were. To walk about the streets of London, with the possibility of meeting him at any corner, would make her life

a purgatory to her. So far she confided to Louise, the only person to whom she ever opened her lips on the subject. Mrs. Fletcher had not found it advisable to keep up their little estrangement for long.

The removal of Georgie from the hotel had been a blow to her, for she foresaw how many advantages she would lose by the transaction. But she loved the leeks and garlic of Egypt too well not to willingly sacrifice her pride for their sake. Before many weeks were over a penitent note found its way from her to Miss Harrington, begging her to forgive the past and receive her bosom friend into favor again.

And Georgie did it, of course. She was not the sort of woman to hold out against such a prayer. She forgot all Mrs. Fletcher's unkindness at once, and remembered only the time when there had been no flaw in their affection.

Louise could never be exactly what she had been to her again, for the links of a chain thus rudely strained are not easily bent into their former position.

But she did not let her see the change; she received her with her former cordiality, and talked to her as confidentially as of old.

Naturally, too, she introduced her to her friends when any occasion presented itself, and made no secret of her friendship with Mr. Hiram Boch.

But when the new melodrama was about to be put upon the stage, every one had to go to the wall to make room for it, and Georgie saw scarcely anything of Louise or Mrs. Lousada-Lorens.

The few moments she could call her own, between the end of the rehearsal and the commencement of the night's work, she usually devoted to Sissy, who ran about New York at her own sweet will, with no better chaperonage than that of Rachel.

One afternoon, when there had been such a "blizzard" blowing through the city that Georgie shivered in her carriage, though wrapped from head to foot in furs, she returned home to find Sissy lying on her bed fast asleep.

"Why, how is this, Rachel?" she asked; "is Miss Sissy tired?"

"I don't know, ma'am! I don't think she can be! We were not out much over an hour."

"Do you mean to say you took the child out on such a

day as this? Really, Rachel, I thought you had more sense."

"Well, ma'am, I didn't know that it would do her any harm, and I don't know as it has! Miss Sissy was bent upon going down to Twenty-fourth Street to buy something at the fancy store, and she was well wrapped up, and wore her furs."

"What made her go to sleep? I never knew her do such a thing before."

"I can't say, ma'am! When she came home she said she would lie down and read—you see she has a book in her hand—and after awhile I saw she was asleep, so I thought it best not to wake her!"

"Well, she must be waked now, at any rate, for dinner will be on the table in a few minutes, and you have not changed her frock!"

"Wake up, Sissy!" continued Georgie, as she roused her little sister, "it is nearly dinner-time, dear; you must get up!"

Sissy opened her blue eyes, gazed at Georgie in a vacant way, and closed them again.

"Why, what is this? Going to sleep again? You lazy child!" exclaimed Miss Harrington. "Don't you hear me speak to you, Sissy? Dinner is ready!"

"I don't want any dinner!" replied the child, fretfully.

"Do leave me alone, Georgie. I'm so sleepy."

"But that is nonsense, dear! You must try and shake it off. You will be hungry in another hour, and then you will be sorry you didn't take my advice! Come! get up, there's a good girl."

But to all her coaxing Sissy only replied, plaintively:

"I am so hot and sleepy!"

Georgie laid her hand on her forehead.

"Why, so she is—burning hot! Rachel, she must have caught cold. You had better put her in a warm bath before she goes to bed to-night. And would you prefer to have some tea up here, Sissy, instead of going down to dinner?"

"I don't want any tea, Georgie," said Sissy. Then she roused herself sufficiently to say: "It's Hiram's birthday to-morrow, and I've got the most beautiful little vase for him," and fell to sleep again immediately.

Georgie became alarmed, but Mrs. Lousada-Lorens as-

sured her it was nothing uncommon, and merely the result of exposure to the extreme cold. So she went to the theater, and left her sister under the charge of Rachel without much anxiety.

The following morning, however, it was very evident that Sissy was ill. Her head was like fire; her body hot and cold by turns; her breathing oppressed, and her eyes unnaturally bright.

A local doctor was sent for, and determined she had merely a cold on the chest, but by the evening he was obliged to confess it was pneumonia.

Georgie was in an agony. Pneumonia was killing its hundreds a week in New York at that moment, and her anxiety for her little sister's safety was extreme. Yet she could not steal one minute from her work. At seven o'clock precisely she must be at the theater, and spend four mortal hours without any news of Sissy.

"How shall I bear it?" she exclaimed to Mrs. Lousada-Lorens. "I shall fancy every hour that she is worse. I feel as if I should go wild!"

"You shall not have that terrible suspense to suffer, dear Miss Harrington," said Mr. Boch, who happened to be present. "With our hostess's permission I will remain here, and carry you news of your little sister throughout the evening."

"*You, Mr. Boch!*"

"Yes, I! Why not? Could I be better employed? Each half hour you shall receive a bulletin. It will be a comfort to me to carry them backward and forward; for you know how fond I am of—Sissy."

"Pray do, Mr. Boch," interposed Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, "for it will be a comfort to me to have you here in case of any emergency. I am so useless in sickness; it frightens me, and takes all my nerve away."

Georgie turned still paler. She had proved Mrs. Lousada-Lorens's incapacity as a nurse, and knew what she said of herself to be correct. But the idea of an "emergency" alarmed her.

"Don't speak like that, Mrs. Lousada-Lorens!" said Mr. Boch, quickly. "You are frightening Miss Harrington without cause! Sissy possesses a vigorous constitution, and will doubtless have taken a turn for the better by night-

fall. And I will guarantee Miss Harrington receives regular bulletins of her condition till then."

Georgie thanked him with trembling lips, but went off in the deepest distress nevertheless. But Mr. Hiram Boch kept his promise. He drove to and fro from the house to the theater all the evening and cheered Georgie's heart by his hopeful accounts. But he did not tell her the truth, for as night drew on the child grew rapidly worse, until the local doctor shook his head, and confessed the case was getting the mastery of him.

"Do you mean she'll die?" cried Mr. Boch. "Nonsense; she shall *not* die! I'll fetch Sartoris from Brooklyn!" that being the name of a famous doctor who had lately effected several remarkable cures.

He made a call at the theater on his way, to assure the anxious sister that all was going on well, and then flew, as fast as his horses would carry him, to Brooklyn, returning with the famous doctor in tow.

It was done just in time. Another half hour, perhaps, and Sissy would never have recovered from the pneumonia.

Dr. Sartoris countermanded everything that the local surgeon had ordered, and stood by the bedside whilst his remedies were being applied. An hour later the patient was pronounced to be out of danger, just as Miss Harrington, eager for news, returned from the theater.

She found Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, Mr. Boch, and the new doctor, in the child's room, and guessed at once that there was danger.

"What is it?" she cried. "Is my sister worse?"

"No, my dear young lady, she is better, thanks to the promptitude of this gentleman," said Dr. Sartoris, indicating Hiram Boch. "Had he been half an hour later in fetching me here, I can not say whether she would have been living now."

"Oh! Mr. Boch!" she exclaimed, with swimming eyes, "how can I repay you?"

"I am paid already," he replied, "in seeing the success of Doctor Sartoris. I knew you could not spare your little sister yet."

Georgie could not answer him; she turned away, choking with emotion.

But when they had all gone for the night, and she had time to talk over the past danger with Mrs. Lousada-

Lorens, she was overwhelmed with gratitude for the service Mr. Boch had rendered her.

"How good of him!" she exclaimed, fervently, "and I hardly said 'thank you.' Oh, I hope he didn't think me unmindful of his kindness. I shall not be happy now until I have seen him again, and thanked him in person for it all."

And, as soon as they met, she poured her gratitude into his ear.

"Mr. Boch, I can never, never thank you sufficiently. Do you know what you have done for me? My sister is my greatest treasure—the creature I love best in the world—the only one left to me to love. If she had died my life would have seemed empty. And it was your forethought that saved her. I don't know what to say; words are powerless to express what I feel. I only wish I could repay your goodness, even if it were by the sacrifice of my life."

And here Georgie drooped her beautiful face into her hands, and cried with pleasure and excitement.

"Dear Miss Harrington, to have restored your sister to you is all the reward I looked for. And yet, if you feel the obligation, it is in your power to wipe it off at once and for ever."

"Can I really? Only tell me *how*?" exclaimed Georgie, raising her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"You say I have given you back your sister. Give me yourself instead of her!"

"Mr. Boch—"

"No; do not answer until you have heard me out! I do not profess to be able to offer you anything adequate to the gift I ask, yet all that I have shall be yours. It will be my pride to take you from this life of toil for ever, and set you on a pedestal for the world to envy and admire, and I will love you—as I have loved you from the first moment that we met—till the last day of my life!"

"Stay, Mr. Boch!—for Heaven's sake say no more! I appreciate your goodness fully, but there has been a terrible mistake! I—"

"Do not tell me you are engaged!" he said, hastily.

"Worse—a thousand times worse! I ought to have told you from the first! *I am married!*"

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ARGUMENT.

WHEN Georgie Harrington told Hiram Boch, in her impetuous way, that she was married, the young man started from her as if he had been struck.

“*Married!*” he repeated, slowly — “married! And when your name is Miss Harrington?”

“My name is not Miss Harrington. I am only called so on the stage. I am the wife of Captain Gerard Legh. I wish I had told you so from the beginning; but it is not a subject I am fond of discussing.”

Mr. Boch left the seat he occupied at her side, and went and leaned against the mantel-piece in silence.

“You have been very cruel to me,” he said, after a long pause, during which Georgie fancied she could hear the beating of his heart—“very, *very* cruel! You have seen my devotion to you; you must have guessed my intentions; and yet you had not the mercy to undeceive me until it was too late!”

Georgie hung her head in the utmost distress.

“Indeed—indeed, Mr. Boch, you do me wrong! You have been very kind to me and Sissy, and I am deeply grateful to you, but I never thought you felt more than a friend should feel toward us both. I have been blind perhaps, but I have not been willfully unkind. I had no idea that you would speak to me as you have done to-day.”

“*No idea?*” he said, bitterly. “You came over here, with all the attractions of your beauty and genius, and pass amongst us under a feigned name, and then you say you had no idea you would have the power to sway our hearts with our senses. Is this not a little bit of affectation, Miss Harrington? My knowledge of your sex hitherto has not tended to convince me of their humility where their charms are concerned.”

“I am not surprised you should think badly of me—” commenced Georgie.

“No, no, I did not say *that!*” interposed Mr. Boch, hastily. “But why have you kept me in the dark so long?”

"I assure you I have utterly mistaken the drift of your attentions to my sister and myself. Knowing that I am married, I am not so keen about such things perhaps as a young girl would be. I can only express my regret for the mistake I have led you into, Mr. Boch, and ask you to pardon me!"

"You know there can be no need of such a word between you and me, Miss Harrington. But answer me one question: Why have you dropped your married name?"

"I have not dropped it in England; but I have been known by my maiden name ever since I stepped upon the stage, and I never anticipated it would create confusion on this side of the Atlantic."

"But where is your husband, then?"

"He is at home," said Georgie, blushing.

"He could let you come out to this country—so young and beautiful as you are—without the protection of his presence? What was he about? He must have guessed you would be surrounded by admirers. He must be rather a strange person."

"Perhaps he trusted me," said Georgie.

"When we value a thing very much, Miss Harrington, we guard it; but perhaps Captain Legh has business that detains him at home. Is he also on the stage?"

"Oh, no!" cried Georgie, smiling at the idea of what Gerard would think at being suspected of following the profession of an actor. "He has no work—he does nothing."

"And you toil all the year round. Is that the fashion in England, Miss Harrington?"

"When people have no money they must make it," replied Georgie, evasively.

"True. Every American will agree with you in that sentiment. We work ourselves from our cradles to our graves, but we never let our women work for us. We are a rough young nation, but we would rather starve than do that."

"Mr. Boch," said Georgie, suddenly, "I think it is only fair to you and myself that you should learn the circumstances that have led me to be so silent on the subject of my married life. You have been so kind and generous to me and Sissy, and this last act of yours toward her has made me so entirely your debtor, that I should be sorry you

should think I could play willfully with the feelings of any one."

"I do not think it indeed, Miss Harrington. Those unjust words escaped me in the first sting of my disappointment. I know and feel that you are far too good for anything of the sort."

"Still, I will tell you," persisted Georgie, "for I am sure you will respect my confidence. I was married three years ago to a man who promised to keep, and whom I believed to be capable of keeping, me as a wife of a gentleman. But he is extravagant, and thoughtless, and he ran through his money in a twelvemonth, so that I was compelled, for all our sakes, to return to the stage!"

"He set you to work for him, in fact."

"It was nothing!" she cried. "I love my profession, and would rather be an actress than an idle woman any day. That is not what I complain of. But my husband did not treat me with common fairness; he took my earnings and spent them freely, whilst he abused the means by which they were gained. And—and—so dissensions arose between us, and our lives became very unhappy, until there was nothing to do but to separate. It is better to separate, is it not," she concluded, wistfully, "than to live a life of continual variance?"

"Much better! There is no doubt of it," he answered. "And so, I suppose, this gentleman, who can spend money, but is too fine to make it, allows you to support him in England, whilst you work out here?"

"Oh, no! I must do him the justice to say that he has refused any assistance from me now. For we are separated, Mr. Boch. It is all over—we shall never live together again!" said Georgie, sadly.

Hiram Boch did not seem to share her regret at the announcement.

"But if that is the case why don't you divorce him, and get rid of him altogether?" he demanded, eagerly.

"I can't divorce him!" she replied, reddening at the idea.

"Not in England, I suppose. You have such queer laws over there—they seem to frustrate the very object for which they were enacted. But in this country you would find it a much easier affair!"

"So I have heard."

“There is our mutual friend for example, Mrs. Lousada-Lorens; her first husband was an idle, dissipated fellow, who squandered his money, and made her more miserable than she will acknowledge now. Had they remained together, their lives would probably have resulted in something much worse. As it is, she was wise enough to take means to set herself free from him, and she is happy.”

“Yes, she has told me as much! It is all very different from what it is at home. And it certainly seems to me that, in some cases, it must be an enormous advantage.”

“Of course it is. It gives people a chance of rectifying an error, and beginning life anew. There are states in this country where divorces may be obtained on the various pleas of non-support, incompatibility of temper, and violence, as well as on graver charges. How I wish, Miss Harrington, that I could see you free! How much happier you would feel for knowing you were so!”

“But such freedom would be of no use to me in England, Mr. Boch; the laws there are very stringent, and until they set me at liberty I should be considered a married woman.”

“Then why go back to England? Why not decide to make your home amongst us? Do you dislike America too much to live here altogether?”

“On the contrary, I have learned both to admire and love her. I think yours is the grandest nation, after our own, that I have ever seen; and the cordiality with which I was received amongst you made me feel at once that I was with friends.”

“Then stay with us, Miss Harrington, and let us be friends forever. I have an eminent legal acquaintance in New York, Judge Sedgeley; let me put your case in his hands; he will tell you just how you stand, and everything that is necessary to be done in order to procure your liberty. Shall I appoint a time for him to call on you?”

“No! no! Mr. Boch!” exclaimed Georgie, shrinking from the idea, “I have never even contemplated the possibility of being legally separated from my husband; the notion is too strange and startling to me. Pray say no more about it, and consider the confidence I have reposed in you as sacred. I should not have mentioned it, except that I wished you to know the reason why I have never spoken of Captain Legh to you. I came out to this coun-

try in order to court forgetfulness of the past. The only way to accomplish it was by never discussing the subject, else you would have been one of the first to whom I should have mentioned it."

"I wish to Heaven you had," returned the young man. "You would have saved me a world of trouble. But you will not cast me off because of this unfortunate avowal, Miss Harrington? You will still let me call myself your nearest friend?"

Georgie looked distressed, but shook her head.

"I don't think it would be wise. I am deeply grateful for your kindness—I shall miss your visits more than I can say; but after what has passed—"

"I understand; you need not go on further!" he exclaimed. "I have made a mistake, and I must take the consequences. I don't suppose that, even if you had been free, you would have stooped to consider my offer!"

Georgie would not answer him. If she *had* been free she thought that her heart might have been seriously attracted toward the handsome young fellow who sat by her side, and asked to be allowed to lay everything he possessed at her feet. But as matters stood it would have been worse than folly to tell him even of a "might-have-been;" so she was obliged to appear indifferent when she was doing her best to be merciful.

"It is useless to talk of that now," she answered, gently, "so I will not wound your feelings by discussing it; only remember that I shall always think of you as a friend, and I hope you will consider me in the same light."

"There is not much use in that," said Mr. Boch, with a sigh. "You women generally offer us a stone when we ask for bread. I would rather you told me to hope for a day that may dawn for both of us."

"I can not tell you what is not true," said Georgie. But though she was exceedingly sorry for Mr. Boch's disappointment, and anxious it should go no further, she was obliged to confide it to Mrs. Lousada-Lorens.

Mr. Hiram Boch, with his handsome face and enormous fortune, had been one of the greatest attractions to her salons, and could not be allowed to absent himself without a reason.

Georgie told her story as delicately as she could; but she received no sympathy from Mrs. Lousada-Lorens.

“And aren't you going to have him?” she asked, as soon as Georgie had concluded.

“My dear friend, how *can* I have him?”

“By doing as I did with Mr. Lousada.”

“But that is not legal in my country.”

“You are not in your country now, my dear; and you know the old saying, ‘When you are in Rome, do as the Romans do.’ If you married Mr. Boch, I presume your home would be in New York! Why, my dear Miss Harrington, that young man has millions of dollars, and is making more every day. He has the power to place you in a palace, and gather the best society around you. You would be raised at once and forever above any necessity for labor, and you would be a little queen in your own circle. Now isn't it worth thinking of?”

“No! no!” cried Georgie, shaking her head; “it is no use thinking of it; it can never be!”

“Ah, I suppose you love that man in England still!”

“Indeed I do not!” said the girl, indignantly.

“You must be hankering after him, or you would never be so foolish as to throw such a chance as this away. You had much better go back to him. I believe you will be miserable until you do.”

“Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, how can you talk to me in such a way, when I have told you how he has ill-treated and insulted me? But I have been brought up to consider marriage sacred, however unhappy it may be; and it seems impossible to me to rupture it on any pretense but one.”

“That is the way with Britishers,” said Mrs. Lousada-Lorens. “Once put an idea into their heads, and you can't get it out again. What's the good of your coming to an enlightened country like this, and not taking advantage of her laws? You are miserable in England; America offers you freedom and happiness, and you refuse them for fear England might object. I'll tell you what you should do, then—make yourself a naturalized American, and you'll be subject to her laws.”

“But not freed from the law of my own conscience,” replied Georgie.

“My dear Miss Harrington, I've no patience with you. If you became one of us, and married according to our laws, you could not be doing wrong.”

"It is a moot question," said Georgie, "and I confess I do not understand it."

"Then make inquiries on the subject, my dear, until it is plain to you. A woman working for her livelihood, and such a pretty woman too! Why, it is an anomaly in the States. We should be ashamed to see it, and ashamed of the woman who did it, too."

"I don't understand that, Mrs. Lousada-Lorens."

"Why, it's like this. Women are made to be worked for, and therefore we think the married woman who works degrades herself and her husband. She lowers herself by taking his place in the world. She lowers him by making him accept her bounty. We must eat, wherever the bread may come from. But to see a refined, delicate creature like you slaving on the public stage is a disgrace to your country; and the man who lets you do it should be shot."

"I am afraid there would be wholesale slaughter in England if that idea was carried out," said Georgie.

"That's just what I hear; but I don't see why you should add to the list of victims when here's a fine, handsome fellow ready to take you out of it all; and not only you, but your sister. You must remember that, Miss Harrington. Why, we think nothing of a divorce in this country. There's Mrs. Pauline Neumeyer, whom you've met in the best houses of New York. She's married to her fourth husband, and two of the others are still alive. What difference does it make to us? You should let Judge Sedgeley explain the law to you. You'd see that it can be managed so quietly that no one will know it's taken place. Why there's hardly a soul in this city knows you're married. I've been asked the question dozens of times and I always say 'no.'"

"Oh, don't deceive them any longer. Let us have no more mistakes. This one has hurt me sufficiently!" cried Georgie, tearfully.

"Well, you hold the remedy in your own hands. You need not let the poor fellow be miserable one minute longer than you choose. Now, will you promise me to think over it?"

"Oh, yes, I'll think over it," replied Georgie, who felt her mind becoming confused and undecided under the arguments of Mrs. Lousada-Lorens.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONFIDANTE.

To return to Captain Gerard Legh.

When he knew for certain that his wife had quitted England, he went back to the house in Park Lane in anything but an enviable state of mind. The little place looked empty and deserted. The servants had been cleaning up after their mistress's departure, and there was an unhome-like sense about everything that struck him forcibly. The house-maid had already packed up and left the house, and the cook had only waited for the captain's arrival to ask him when she should be at liberty to follow suit.

"And why do *you* want to go?" he inquired irritably.

The cook looked down and twisted her apron.

"Well, you see, sir, Mrs. Legh, she paid us our wages before she went, so as we might take our choice; and in course it isn't the same thing now the others has gone, nor living with a single gentleman isn't what I've been used to—still, I've no wish to leave before you're suited, sir, nor to ill-convenience you in any way."

"Oh, go by all means!" cried Captain Legh, impetuously, as he slammed the door. He had a strong suspicion that he knew why the rats deserted the sinking ship. They had heard too much, both of his temper and his impecuniosity; and even if he controlled the first, they had grave doubts if they should ever see their wages. Captain Legh could do with very little service in his own home if he dined at the club every day; but as he sat alone that evening, smoking a solitary cigar and calculating his resources, he was obliged to come to the conclusion that club dinners must be struck off the list of his indulgences for the future. He had refused the assistance of his wife, and two hundred a year would barely cover his actual necessities. At last the idea struck him to let the house. The season was past, but it was beautifully furnished, and ought to bring in another couple of hundred a year at least.

When Captain Legh had got this idea in his head, he could not rest till he had discussed it with a friend.

He tossed off a glass of claret, threw the end of his cigar

away, and strolled up Park Lane to call on Mrs. Lacy, Marian Lacy's mother.

This lady, who was a widow, lived with her daughter in a suite of rooms over a shop in Baker Street. She had known Gerard Legh before he became acquainted with Georgie Harrington, and, in those days, used to speak of her brother's child as of one on the road to destruction. What her sister-in-law had been thinking of, when she allowed her daughter to mingle in so demoralizing an atmosphere as that of the stage, she was unable to understand. But when Georgie not only succeeded in her profession, but married a scion of the aristocracy, Mrs. Lacy changed her tone.

Hers was no longer a name that had to be mentioned in a whisper, but was dragged in by the head and shoulders to every conversation.

"My niece, the Honorable Mrs. Legh!" was constantly on the lips of Mrs. Lacy. Marian was as much in Georgie's house as in her own, and both mother and daughter benefited largely by the young actress's liberality and patronage.

Mrs. Lacy had even urged Georgie to take her cousin to America.

"Let our dear Marian accompany you," she said, "in any capacity you like; only make her useful, and a comfort to you, and I shall be satisfied. I can not bear to think of your going across the water alone."

But Marian had resisted the proposition; she had no wish to leave England in her cousin's train. So the subject was dropped between them.

But though the Lacys had always upheld Georgie in public, and professed to sympathize largely with her in private, they had not withdrawn their friendship from Captain Legh in consequence. He was the aristocratic link they could not afford to ignore.

Owing to Lord and Lady Kinlock not having noticed their daughter-in-law, her relations had not yet derived much advantage from the connection; but they had not lost hope of doing so, and when Gerard Legh walked into their sitting-room on that August evening, they received him with an effusive welcome. It was the day after Georgie sailed from Liverpool, and Marian had been home since the night before.

"This is really kind of you, Captain Legh," said Mrs. Lacy, with an outstretched hand, "coming to see us on this sad occasion, as if we were trusted friends. I suppose you know that my dear Marian saw Georgie off yesterday afternoon?"

"Did she go down to Liverpool with her?" demanded Captain Legh.

"Yes! my niece wished it, and I thought it would look better if she had some of her own family with her to the last. Not as if she were going *so entirely* against our wishes, you know; and Marian did not leave her till the steamer started."

"Indeed!" replied Captain Legh, stretching himself languidly in his chair; "I hope she went off in good spirits."

"Oh, excellent!" cried Marian, and then she stopped suddenly and looked at her mother, as if she had made a mistake.

"Go on, my dear," said Mrs. Lacy, complacently. "I suppose there's nothing to conceal, and it's just as well that Captain Legh should know the truth."

"Certainly," acquiesced Gerard, lazily; "I never supposed she would cry at leaving me."

"She kept up wonderfully," continued Marian; "I was completely surprised; I didn't think Georgie had so much courage."

"You credited her, perhaps, with more heart."

"Oh, no, Captain Legh! you mustn't say that, but she really was brave. They had a big dinner at the hotel the night before, and she laughed and talked with everybody as if she hadn't a care in the world. The only time she showed any signs of breaking down was just at the last, when she had to say good-bye to her friends."

"I suppose she had any number of friends to see her off?"

"Oh, yes, a great many; but Georgie didn't mind parting from any of them much—except me, of course, and Mr. Brabazon Chauncey."

"Oh, Mr. Brabazon Chauncey was there, was he?" said Gerard, waking up.

"Why, of course he was. Do you think it likely that he would let Georgie leave England without a last good-bye, when he is the oldest friend she has in the world?"

"I know he is a very old friend," replied Captain Legh, dryly.

"Poor Georgie couldn't be comforted at all, when it came to our leaving her, until he had promised to go over to New York if she didn't return at the settled time."

"My belief is that she doesn't intend to return at all," said Gerard.

"Is it?" said Marian; but she never contradicted his assertion.

"And what do *you* intend to do, Captain Legh?" commenced Mrs. Lacy. "Marian and I are so anxious for your comfort that we should like to know!"

"I should like to know myself," he responded; "but I am quite uncertain—in fact, I came up here this evening to ask your advice. You see my wife has taken all her money with her."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" interpolated Mrs. Lacy, sympathetically.

"And my income is not sufficient to keep up the house properly. I could not dine by myself on a mutton-chop either evening after evening. I've been accustomed to company, and perfect solitude would madden me. I should go down to my own people at Summerhayes, but unfortunately my marriage with Georgie has estranged me from them all. I was thinking, therefore, of letting the house. What do you say to the idea?"

"A very good one, as far as the house is concerned, Captain Legh; but what about yourself?" said Mrs. Lacy. "A life in chambers or apartments will not be much more lively for you. What you want is society at home."

"But I can't get it," said Gerard. "My wife has deserted me, and left me to shift for myself. I shall have to live *en garçon* for the future."

"I have a little plan in my head," returned Mrs. Lacy, "though I don't know if it will come to anything. What should you say to Marian and I taking your house off your hands?"

Marian grew crimson, and looked at her mother with a startled gaze.

"Oh, mamma!" she exclaimed, and there stopped.

"I don't quite understand," said Captain Legh. "What would you do with your own?"

"We are going to leave these rooms at the end of a fort-

night. The landlord wants to raise the roof of the house; and I could not stand the noise and dirt of the workmen. So I am thinking, if you would like us to occupy yours—for a time, at least—and then you need not turn out of it. What I pay here for rent will be sufficient to cover the expenses of your board and an extra servant; and for the rest, Marian and I will manage for ourselves. By this means you will have what I hope will be a comfortable home to come to, and your income at your own disposal.”

“Mamma, it is the loveliest proposal in the world!” cried Marian, excitedly.

“Let us hear what Captain Legh says to it, my dear.”

“I second Marian’s decision, Mrs. Lacy; and I am very much obliged to you for thinking of it. It will take all domestic trouble off my hands, and it will give me, as you say, a home. I’ve had little enough of one lately, Heaven knows.”

“Poor fellow!” said Marian, softly.

“But I am no longer to be compassionated,” replied Gerard, more brightly. “I shall grow fat and lazy most probably under Mrs. Lacy’s kind care; and you’ll be trying all sorts of devices to get me out of the house.”

“You need not be afraid of that,” said the girl. “Although I am Georgie’s first cousin, I don’t think any one ever detected any great resemblance between us.”

“Resemble your cousin Georgie, my love!” cried her mother, indignantly. “I should think not! She is very handsome, doubtless—she takes after my poor brother in that—but she has my sister-in-law’s disposition, which was a very unfortunate one; and I should be sorry to think a child of mine could behave as she has done. Marriage is a sacred obligation, Captain Legh; and when Marian enters into that state, I sincerely trust she may fulfill its duties better than her poor cousin has done!”

“Don’t talk like that, mamma!” exclaimed Marian.

“I shall never marry. I have told you so scores of times.”

“I advise you strongly not,” said Gerard Legh, as he rose to leave, “unless you can make a better thing of it than I have. I suppose I may consider our bargain settled, Mrs. Lacy, and expect you to take up your quarters with me as soon as you leave these rooms?”

“We will certainly do so, Captain Legh; and I trust the arrangement will prove a satisfactory one to both parties.”

In consequence of this agreement the Lacys moved into the little house in Park Lane the following week, and laid themselves out to make Captain Legh comfortable and happy. To the mother it was an infinite advantage to exchange two rooms for the pleasant abode which poor Georgie had just vacated. She was put to no extra expense, and she received double for her money.

And to Marian the new arrangement was more agreeable than she would have liked to confess even to her mother. The least benefit she expected to gain from it was an introduction to some of Captain Legh's aristocratic friends. Now that Georgie was out of the way, she thought the idea was feasible. So from the moment she and her mother took possession of his house she laid herself out to be agreeable to him. It was Marian who was always present to make his breakfast, at whatever hour it might be served, and who sat up to receive him when he came home at night, in case he needed any refreshment before he went to bed.

These midnight interviews lapsed before long into confidential conversations, that were frequently carried on into the small hours of the morning—conversations chiefly of Georgie, and her conduct in the past—with conjectures of what she was doing in the present, and likely to do in the future; for Captain Legh was suffering acutely, although he would have died sooner than acknowledge it.

His bodily comforts were attended to, but his home was nothing to him, compared to what it had been in the palmy days, when Georgie's sweet smile, and sweeter kiss, had welcomed him over the threshold; and he knew that his punishment was not undeserved. Deep in his heart lay the conviction that his morbid jealousy and evil tempers had been quite uncalled for, and that if he had behaved only decently to her, she would have continued cheerfully to fulfill all the duties of a wife to him.

But the same pride which had prevented his acknowledging it then prevented his acknowledging it now; and when he mentioned her, it was only to condemn her conduct and excuse his own.

Marian took care to foster the illusion; she was always ready to recall the worst points in Georgie's character, and to ignore the good ones.

She would talk by the hour of her high temper, and sug-

gest that the large sums of money she made had inflated her vanity to such a degree that she expected her private friends to bow down before her as the public did. And whilst she professed to exonerate her cousin from the charge of flirting, she brought forward evidences that tended so much in the other direction, and Captain Legh would leave her side, secretly torn to pieces with jealousy, and vowing vengeance on his unseen and unknown rivals.

Marian Lacy took the course, in fact, that most of our female friends do the minute our backs are turned upon them.

She had no *malice prepense* in the matter; she was not a villain of a first-class dye; she was scheming at no deep plot for the destruction of Georgie's future happiness, or the elevation of her own; she was simply *talking too much*, giving out her ideas as they came into her mind, without reasoning if they were correct. And her ideas, like those of many of her sex, wavered with the person she spoke to.

There was a fascination about Georgie Harrington that forced her to sympathize with her personal grievances. But she liked and admired Gerard Legh; she had done so from the day they met, and she was very pleased to be selected as his confidante.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LETTERS.

WHEN the Lacys had been established for some months in Captain Legh's house, Lady Henry Masham called upon them. The announcement that she was in the drawing-room gave Marian Lacy unqualified pleasure; she had met Lady Henry occasionally, whilst spending the afternoon with her cousin, but she had never been admitted to Hatleigh House.

She believed now that her desire in this respect would be gratified, and that her ladyship's visit must be followed by an invitation. She ran down-stairs, therefore, in the greatest flutter to receive her; but her hopes were somewhat damped by the opening words of her guest:

"I called to learn the address of Captain Legh, Miss Lacy, and was quite astonished when the servant said *you* were in. How long have you taken up your abode here?"

"Mamma came to keep house for Gerard as soon as my cousin Georgie quitted England, and of course I accompanied her," replied Marian.

"Oh! a prearrangement with Miss Harrington, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Marian, unhesitatingly; "we couldn't have left him *quite* alone, could we?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," sniffed her ladyship; "Captain Legh has looked after himself pretty well during his life, I fancy; and I should have thought that a married man, who had got a holiday, would prefer to spend it in a freer fashion than having to dance attendance on two ladies who have no claim upon him."

"Oh, of course we leave Cousin Gerard entirely free to follow his own devices!" exclaimed Marian, "but he prefers having his meals at home, and mamma can look after his comforts better than the servants."

"And where is a letter to reach Captain Legh, Miss Lacy?"

"His letters all come here, or to the club in Poynders Street; but if you like to leave a message for him, Lady Henry, I shall have great pleasure in delivering it."

"Thanks! I won't trouble you!" said her ladyship, curtly.

She seemed to have conceived a dislike to Marian.

"And when did you have news of Miss Harrington?" she asked, after a pause.

"I have had several letters from her—the last, two days ago. She has made a great success in New York, and has heaps of friends. Her head seems quite turned by the fuss they make about her. A few weeks ago, when she played in Brooklyn, the gentlemen erected an arch of roses for her to pass under as she went in and out of the theater."

"Ah! I never thought any good would come of her going to America," said Lady Henry, shaking her head, "and without her husband too. Why on earth didn't she take him with her? All London is saying that she has run away from him. It is very scandalous! I shall consider it quite a duty to give Captain Legh the support of my countenance during her absence; the poor young man is to be pitied rather than condemned; that's what I say to any one who asks me about the matter."

Marian Lacy looked round to see if the door was fast closed, and then drew nearer to her guest mysteriously.

"Ah! Lady Henry, you are perfectly right! I can not help saying so, although Georgie is my cousin, and mamma would back me up directly, if she were here. It is a terrible distress to us; but we do not believe that she will ever return to England!"

"I should not be surprised. These actresses—you'll forgive my speaking openly, Miss Lacy—are very flighty, as a rule, and have little sense of the meaning of the word Duty. Miss Harrington has been rather remiss in that particular already, from what I hear."

"Oh! it was too dreadful!" cried Marian, clasping her hands; "the quarreling, and abuse, and violence that used to go on between them, and I am sure it was all Georgie's fault; she might have prevented so much of it had she chosen; but she aggravated poor Captain Legh till he did not know what he was about, and taunted him with his poverty till he was nearly mad. We always pitied him greatly, mamma and I, but we had no influence with Georgie, and it was not our business to speak."

"Naturally! It is no use putting your finger between the fire and the wood. I suppose it will end in the usual way—divorce! And what are Captain Legh's plans for the future?"

"I don't think he has made any," replied Marian; "he seems very contented as he is."

"But it must be very stupid for him living alone with you and your mother," said Lady Henry, with more truth than politeness. "He is a man who has been used to society, and though London is very dull at present, we must see what we can do for him. This is a time when the members of his own class must rally round him to show their sympathy. For my own part, although I admire Miss Harrington on the stage, I have always considered he was thrown away upon her. All the Kinlocks are warm-hearted and warm-tempered people, and I'm afraid your cousin is just a little bit cold."

"Oh, she is dreadfully cold, Lady Henry. She is wrapped up in her art, and thinks of nothing outside it. I don't believe she would make any man happy."

"She evidently has not made Captain Legh so; and in New York she will be surrounded by temptations. I

shouldn't be surprised to hear any day that she had married somebody else. They do the most extraordinary things out there I believe."

"It will be a happy release for him if she does," sighed Marian.

Lady Henry glanced at her suspiciously.

"Well, I hope if he ever finds himself free that he won't make a fool of himself for the second time, Miss Lacy. I should think an experience like this was enough for a man's life-time; but I can hardly conceive it likely. If anything occurs to separate them, I shall make it my aim to bring him and his people together again. Captain Legh ought to be living amongst the aristocracy. It is always a mistake when a man drops out of his own sphere. He doesn't know what he may encounter, and generally finds himself unable to cope with his surroundings.

Marian Lacy (with the hope of an invitation to Hatleigh House) did not dare take any notice of the rudeness of these remarks, but tried to change the conversation by asking Lady Henry if she would take any tea.

"Oh, dear, no—certainly not," rejoined her ladyship, as if to eat or drink in the house under present circumstances were altogether beneath her. "I could not wait indeed. I have to go on to the Duchess of Carnavon's, and only stopped on my way to ask for Captain Legh's address. The club in Poynders Street, you say? Thank you very much. Good-afternoon."

"Or *here*," interposed Marian; "the letter would be safer sent here, and certain to reach him sooner."

"Just so. I will remember," replied Lady Henry, whose feminine intuition made her doubt if any letters would reach Captain Legh's hands that Miss Lacy desired to keep out of them. "And do you mean to say that he has not heard from his wife?"

"Not a line, Lady Henry—not a single line. Isn't it cruel?"

"It is shameful! I really couldn't have believed it of Miss Harrington, although (as I have said) I never had any great opinion of her off the stage. Good-bye, Miss Lacy. Pray don't trouble yourself to come down-stairs. Remember me kindly to Captain Legh."

And Lady Henry Masham drove off in her carriage without dropping a single hint about Hatleigh.

"The old cat," thought Marian Lacy, as she watched her departure from the window, "talking about Gerard 'dropping out of his own sphere.' That was a hint to *me*, I suppose, not to imagine her visit was paid to us; but I'll be even with her. If she asks Gerard to Hatleigh without mamma or me he sha'n't go. I believe she would like to get up a flirtation with him now Georgie is away. As if he would look at an old thing of forty, with false hair, and teeth, and rouge laid on so thick you might dig it off her face with a spade— What is it, Ellen?" she continued aloud, as a servant entered the room.

"Letters, miss, for you and the captain."

"Give them to me," said Marian, stretching out her hand. The first letter she examined was her own. It came from New York, and had been written by Louise Fletcher at the time of her estrangement from Georgie Harrington. Marian read it through with eyes that sparkled with delight. The very thing she wished most in all the world seemed likely to come to pass. She perused the letter two or three times, and at each perusal her cheeks flushed deeper, and her satisfaction seemed more complete, until she thrust it in her pocket in a fever of anticipation; but her blood cooled considerably as she glanced at the superscription on the other epistle. She recognized the scrawling, illiterate writing at once. She had seen it on notes to Georgie before—on scraps of paper sent into the dressing-room at the theater or left at the door instead of a message. It was that of Miss Sylvia Marchmont.

"*Sylvia Marchmont!*" said Marian to herself. "What business can she have to write to Gerard? It is disgraceful of her attacking a married man in this way directly his wife's back is turned. I shall not give this letter to Gerard; if it is anything serious she can write again; and if it is any of her nonsense, it is far better, both for him and herself, that it should be destroyed."

But she did not destroy it.

It was December by this time, and the fire was burning brightly in the grate, and would have consumed the letter in no time; but Marian turned it round and round in her hands instead, until, with a sudden impulse, she opened and read it. As she did so her eyes flashed indignantly, and she stamped her foot upon the ground.

“MY DEAR OLD GERARD” (it began),—“Why didn’t you come behind on Friday? I was waiting for you all the evening. Now mind, I shall be in the park, at the usual place, at twelve o’clock, on Tuesday, and you must come and let me know all about the Crystal Palace. The ‘bos’s’ made such a fuss about your kissing me last week. One would think it was a mortal sin. Good-bye till Tuesday, you dear old darling. I have mislaid your friend’s address, so send this to your own house. Don’t show it to Miss Marian.

“Ever your affectionate

“SYLVIA.”

“Little minx!” exclaimed Miss Lacy, as she finished the latter. “Fancy her impudence in calling Gerard by his Christian name, and making appointments with him! I’d send this note on to her father, only he’d make a fuss about it to Gerard, and I should have to bear the blame. But he sha’n’t have it, all the same. Miss Sylvia may air her heels in the park on Tuesday until she is tired of the game. It will serve her right. I declare these women all come like harpies round a man directly he is left without protection; but they forget that I am here to circumvent them. So there goes Miss Sylvia’s elegant epistle into the fire.”

It was scarcely consumed to ashes before Gerard himself entered the room, looking worried and anxious.

“You are home very early,” said Marian, starting.

“Yes. I met an old friend, who has been jawing me to death. Let me have a cup of tea, Marian; my head aches with his incessant chatter.”

She busied herself to get what he desired: and it was not until she had ministered to his bodily comforts that she ventured to ask him:

“And who was the friend who bothered you so, Gerard?”

“General Kimberley. He’s an old chum of my father’s, and thinks he has a right to lecture me; and by Jove he went a little too far to-day! He has been talking to me about Georgie, you know. He declares it is all my fault that she went out to America, and that I ought to have insisted on accompanying her there.”

“What nonsense; when you had not the money.”

“Just what I told the old gentleman, and he said I

should have raised it. In fact, he was so earnest on the subject that he offered to lend me the necessary funds to join her."

Marian Lacy grew suddenly pale.

"He evidently knows nothing of the life you led whilst together, or he would not advise your trying it over again," she said, with trembling lips.

"Indeed he does! I gave him a most graphic description of it, but he said it had nothing to do with the matter. He thinks that, away from England and her old influences, things may go better with us; and that, under any circumstances, it is my duty to give Georgie the protection of my presence. He says that if she goes wrong, or anything of that sort, the blame will justly be laid at my door."

"No wonder he gave you a headache," replied Marian.

"And what did you answer to all this rubbish?"

"I hardly knew what to answer. The old man talked so fast he hardly gave me time to put in a word. But things are getting very unpleasant for me at the club, Marian; the fellows are always asking me after my wife, and wondering why I am not with her, and it makes me feel stupid. It is impossible to explain one's family matters to all the world. She has placed me in a most awkward position."

"What is the use of thinking of it, since it can not be remedied?" demanded Marian.

"Well, I've been considering whether it wouldn't be as well for me to go out to New York and show myself, if it's only for a few weeks, and perhaps Georgie and I might come to some arrangement together. I do not suppose we can go on living apart like this forever. We had better hang ourselves at once and have done with it."

"I am amazed beyond measure to hear you talk like this!" said Marian. "I thought the matter was settled before my cousin started. I remember she told me distinctly at Liverpool that she should never live with you again. And her conduct since your separation has borne out her words. Has she ever written to you, or even inquired after you? If so, it has never reached my ears."

"I know she has not," returned Captain Legh; "but she was doubtless very much offended by my last letter, and chooses this way of showing her resentment. Georgie

is very high-tempered you know, Marian, and does not easily forgive an injury. And I was wrong—I acknowledge it—to write to her as I did.”

“I really don’t see you have any cause to blame yourself,” said Marian. “She made your life a purgatory to you for three years.”

“Not for three. We were happy enough till the last twelvemonth,” interposed her companion.

“Oh, for *one* then,” retorted Marian, testily. “It was long enough, any way, to destroy all signs of mutual affection between you, and to make you fight like cat and dog. And I really don’t see why you need accuse yourself of causing the result. It was *she* that left *you*. She chose to make her own arrangements without any reference to yours, and she did it solely to get rid of you. How do you suppose *she* would like it if you suddenly took it into your head to follow her to New York? You may be quite sure you’re not wanted there, and can hardly expect to receive a welcome.”

Captain Legh hung his head despondently.

“I suppose not. I am not sure that I deserve one. But if I went after her, Georgie would at least see that I was ready to make it up. For this kind of life doesn’t suit me, Marian, and that’s the fact. I am neither married nor single, and I must make a change somewhere before long.”

To hear that his mode of life was wearying him was gall and wormwood to Marian Lacy, but she swallowed her disappointment as she replied:

“Perhaps the change may come to you without your seeking it, if you will have a little patience, Gerard.”

“I don’t understand your meaning.”

“This letter from Louise Fletcher may make it plainer to you,” she said, as she drew it from her pocket.

“Has that old hag been writing to you? How do the Yankees like her wig and her natural complexion?”

“There was a great deal to ridicule in Mrs. Fletcher personally, but she was always a good friend to your wife,” said Marian. “And she does not seem to have been requited with more gratitude than some other of Georgie’s friends.”

“Have they quarreled at last then?” inquired Captain Legh.

“I will read you Mrs. Fletcher’s letter, and you will be

able to judge for yourself. I will skip the commencement, which is only descriptive of her rooms."

"Yes, yes, spare me the twaddle and come to the main point!" cried Gerard Legh, impatiently.

"Well, here it is," resumed Marian, after a pause.

"I am sure you will be grieved to hear, dear Miss Lacy, that Georgie and I have had a sad misunderstanding, which has resulted in my settling myself in separate rooms. The cause of our separation was at first *a complete mystery* to me; but Georgie found fault with my receiving *any friends*, which of course was absurd for two ladies living together, and especially when our rooms *were crowded* with her own! And at last she was *so rude* to one of my acquaintances *and myself* that I was *compelled* to find another set of rooms. *Afterward* the mystery came out. There was *one friend*, it seems, of hers, of whom she did not wish me to see too *much*—a Mr. Hiram Boch—who visits her *constantly*. He is young, and handsome, and a millionaire. He almost *lives* at the house of a Mrs. Lousada-Lorens—a very flighty person—and now Georgie has taken up her residence altogether with Mrs. Lorens, so I suppose she sees him every day. Indeed I have heard it said that Mrs. Lorens *declares* that Georgie is about to bring a suit for divorce against Captain Legh for *non-support*, and marry Mr. Boch. Such things *can* be done in this country, you know, and *are* done every day. I really think it *looks like it*; but I have seen *very little* of Georgie lately, and when we meet she tells me *nothing*."

Marian glanced up as she finished reading, and was shocked to see Captain Legh's face, which had turned livid with passion.

"I thought there was some plot brewing," he exclaimed, vehemently, "when she made this sudden determination to go to America! Divorce me! Nonsense! How *can* she divorce me, when I've done nothing to deserve it?"

"You hear what Mrs. Fletcher says—that she is going to sue you on the plea of non-support. And as far as that goes, you know, you never *have* supported her!"

"But that will be of no use in England!"

"Perhaps Georgie will not care for returning to England. Perhaps she intends to live the rest of her life in America," said Marian, calmly.

Captain Legh began to fume; but she stopped him.

"What is the use of being so violent, Gerard? If you think you can prevent this business, you had better go out to New York and see about it. But I confess I should consider it beneath your dignity."

"Go out to New York!" he reiterated. "Not I! No, this news has decided me. If she has so little respect for herself and for me as to adopt an illegal method to dissolve our marriage, she may go her own way from this moment! I shall never trouble her again by word or sign. We will be separated (as she herself expressed it), *forever!*" And Captain Legh, passing suddenly from the apartment, slammed the door behind him, and sought refuge in his own room.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TRUE FRIEND.

As soon as Mrs. Fletcher had made up her quarrel with Georgie Harrington, she began to pour out all her troubles into her friendly bosom again.

She seemed to forget—after the manner of women—the cause of the difference between them, and talked as freely of Charlie Randall as if she were at liberty to enjoy his doubtful friendship.

At such times Georgie invariably tried to change the subject. It was painful to her to listen to an old woman maundering about a boy's adoration. She would never answer Louise so much as by a word when she approached this topic, and Mrs. Fletcher could not fail to see that it was a distasteful one to her.

But one day she invaded Miss Harrington's apartments in evident distress, and had scarcely entered them before she burst into tears.

"My dear Louise," exclaimed Georgie, softened by the sight, "is anything the matter? Is Mr. Fletcher ill?"

"Oh, no! no! he is well enough, I believe. It is quite a different thing. I am *ruined*, Georgie!"

"*Ruined!* What can you mean?"

"My money, dear. You know I only brought out a certain sum to last me for six months or so—it's so much trouble getting it backward and forward—and Dickey de-

pend on me in case of any extra expenses. And I have been so foolish and thoughtless, but then—”

“My dear Louise, I wish you'd try and speak coherently. I don't in the least know what you are crying about. Was your money in a bank? Has it failed? How have you lost it?”

“All through that boy, dear—that Charlie Randall!”

“Ugh!” ejaculated Georgie, with an expression of disgust, as she turned away.

“Now, don't be angry, Georgie dear, for I'm in real trouble. Do let me tell you all about it, and give me your advice what to do!”

At this appeal Miss Harrington conquered her aversion to the subject of Mr. Randall, and settled herself down to listen.

“I think you have heard, Georgie, that my private income is eight hundred a year. I can't anticipate it, you know, because it's in consols, but I get the dividend half-yearly. Well, last October my trustees lodged four hundred pounds for me in the Madison Square Bank, and Dickey thought it would be ample for me to live on until April. And so it would have been, except for Charlie Randall.”

“What on earth has Mr. Randall to do with it?” inquired Georgie.

“Well, dear, you know he's not rich, and he has debts, and he began by asking me for a small loan to meet a bill with, and I lent it him, foolishly thinking, of course, that he would return it. And so it went on, until he persuaded me to let him have a couple of hundred pounds; he declared it was only for a week, and that he should have double the sum by that time. But he failed or something—at least, the speculation did, in which he was concerned, and so it is all gone, and I haven't enough to go on with, and Dickey will want to have an explanation of it when he comes back, and I don't know what on earth to do!” concluded Mrs. Fletcher, with another burst of tears, that washed her painted face like a spring shower.

“I hope the circumstance has made you see Mr. Randall's attentions to you in their true light,” said Georgie, gravely. “You are vain, Louise, but this ought really to open your eyes. You imagined this young man was simply dying of love for you, whereas he has only had an eye to

borrowing your money. Didn't you suspect his motives when he first asked you to lend it him?"

"No! How should I? The poor boy was hard up, and came to me as a friend. It would have seemed very unkind of me to refuse."

"If he had come to you as a *friend*, as he might have gone to his mother—for you are quite old enough to be his mother, Louise—I should not have thought so badly of him; but he professed to be in love with you, and worked on your vanity in order to get hold of your money. I always thought him a fool, but now I see he is more of a knave. What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know what to do! I am at my wits' end!"

"Is there no chance of recovery?"

"Not the slightest! He has lost it on Wall Street!"

"And do you still intend to receive him as a friend?"

"I have not thought about it. Why do you worry me with such questions, Georgie, when I am beside myself with the difficulty of the position I am placed in?"

"Because I want to help you, Louise, but it must be on my own conditions. You know I never liked young Randall, and thought the intimacy a dangerous one for you. Will you give it up?"

"What good will that do? I have no more money to lend him. The question is, how am I to pay my weekly bills till April?"

"I will lend you the money cheerfully, dear Louise," replied Georgie, as she walked to her writing-table; "how much do you require? Will two hundred be enough?"

"Georgie, you are not going to lend me two hundred pounds?"

"Why should I not? You know that I am coining more money in this country than I can spend. I will *give* it you willingly if it will save you from any unpleasantness with Mr. Fletcher."

Mrs. Fletcher grew red beneath her veil. The letter to Marian Lacy, which contained those cruel insinuations against Georgie, had crossed the ocean two weeks before; it was gone beyond recall, but she had the grace left to feel ashamed of it.

She stammered so much in reply that Miss Harrington thought she felt some reluctance in accepting her offer.

"Come, Louise, don't be silly. This is a little private

matter between ourselves, and need never go any further. Here is the check," said Georgie, placing it in her hand; "I have made it payable to you, so all you have to do is to send it to your banker's, and never mention the subject again between us. Only you will promise me to give up the acquaintance of Mr. Randall?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," whimpered Louise, as she kissed her friend; "I'm sure I never wish to see him any more, since he has deceived me so cruelly. And I don't know what I should have done without your assistance, Georgie, for Dickey is very particular, you know, and always looks at my accounts, and he would never have forgiven me if he had found it out!"

"He would have had every reason to be angry," replied Georgie; "but mind you never give him anything worse to find out, Louise. Living alone as you do, you can not be too careful whom you receive. But I hope your troubles in that way are over."

Mrs. Fletcher pocketed the check and went her way; and Georgie, hearing no further news of Mr. Randall, concluded that she had kept her promise, and given up so dangerous an acquaintance. What was her astonishment, therefore, when, a month later, she found Richard Fletcher, newly returned from his Western tour, pacing up and down her sitting-room floor in a state of the greatest agitation!

"Miss Harrington," he began, as soon as she entered the apartment, "you must excuse my having asked to see you at this early hour; but I have to return to Boston by the evening train."

"This *is* a surprise!" said Georgie, as she gave him her hand. "By the last accounts I had from Louise you were in Buffalo."

"No, no," replied Mr. Fletcher, who appeared very nervous. "We traveled from there last week, and open at Boston to-morrow evening. But I heard news whilst on tour that distressed me very much, Miss Harrington, and I have come to New York on that account."

"Indeed! I am very sorry it should be so! May I ask the cause of it?" said Georgie, who had almost forgotten the little episode with Louise.

"Certainly. My wife is the cause of it. Miss Harrington, you lived in the same rooms with her at the Excelsior Hotel. Did you know a man of the name of Randall?"

Georgie was on her guard at once. She felt that a word of hers might make or mar the future happiness of Louise. She would not have told a falsehood for all the world; but at the same time, no woman who ever called her "friend" had had reason to reproach her with treachery or even weakness in her cause. As Mr. Fletcher's excited question fell on her ear, therefore, she drew herself up, and answered, calmly:

"Certainly; Mr. Randall used to visit me occasionally at the Excelsior."

"Oh, Miss Harrington, how I wish you had never admitted him! You don't know the harm that has accrued from it to my poor foolish wife. Everybody is talking about it. What her interest is in this young man I have not yet found out; but I hear that she has lent him large sums of money for gambling purposes, and that he has half ruined her."

Georgie smiled quietly.

"Louise does not look much like a ruined woman to me. But what does she say to your charge, Mr. Fletcher?"

"I have not seen her yet. I have come straight to you. I want to hear all you can tell me about this business before I meet my wife; for I can not depend on her word, Miss Harrington, and I am determined to know the truth of it!"

"I don't know what I have ever done, Mr. Fletcher, to make you think I would stoop to become a tale-bearer!" replied Georgie, proudly. "You seem to forget that Louise is my *friend*; and you will never hear one word against her from my lips."

"I know you are stanch and true; but surely you will not refuse to help me in this dilemma? How am I to hear the truth if no one will tell me?"

"What is it you wish to hear?"

"For one thing, why did you part company with Louise? I thought you had agreed to live together?"

"So we did for some months. But I am staying here as the guest of Mrs. Lousada-Lorens. You could hardly expect her to invite my friends with myself."

"That is true; but when Louise engaged rooms for herself, I understand this man Randall was in them every evening—that, in fact, he almost *lived* there, and all the hotel knew it."

"I suppose Louise found him a pleasant companion,"

replied Georgie, indifferently. "She is fond of the society of young people."

"Perhaps so; but she might have entertained others besides this clerk. I hear of no name but his! And then, her giving him all her money. How do you account for that, Miss Harrington?"

"I don't see that I am called upon to account for it, Mr. Fletcher. You have yet to give me proofs that it is true."

"It *must* be true! All the city knows it! The fellow himself has boasted of it everywhere!"

"Well, I suppose it will be easy to ascertain the truth."

"How? You do not suppose Louise would tell it to me? She will be too much ashamed."

"Has she applied to you for money, Mr. Fletcher?"

"No, she never does. She has her own income."

"But if she has given it all away (as your informants declare), how does she live? She has to pay ready money in New York. Don't you think she would have been in want of funds by this time?"

"That never struck me!" exclaimed Mr. Fletcher.

"But she may have borrowed of a friend—of *you*," he added, suspiciously.

"She has not borrowed of me," replied Georgie, thankful to remember that she had *given* Louise the check that was to help her out of her difficulties.

"But even then," continued the husband, "there is their excessive intimacy to be accounted for. It is most galling to me, Miss Harrington, to think that, whilst I am working hard at my profession, my wife is making herself the talk and scandal of the city."

"Naturally it must be. But I have heard nothing of it."

"Do you mean to say that you have never met this man Randall in my wife's rooms at the Excelsior?"

"*Never!*" replied Georgie, firmly, which, as she had not entered Mrs. Fletcher's rooms after their separation, was perfectly true. "Louise and I had a slight dispute before I left the hotel, which was happily made up soon after I came here. So she is good enough always to take the initiative and visit me without asking for a return, knowing how very busy I am."

"What was your dispute about?" asked Richard Fletcher, still suspicious.

Georgie saw she had made an error, but corrected it at once.

"I originated it, and it concerned me alone," she answered.

"And you are as good friends as before?"

"Quite as good."

"Well, I can't understand it," said Mr. Fletcher, with a sigh, as he rose from his seat. "There is no doubt there has been a great deal of scandal and talk about it, which has driven me wild. Of course I know Louise is not clever, but I thought she was past all this sort of thing. But the money matter seemed to settle it. It made the rest plain, and I came to the city determined to punish the young rascal if I could, and have it out with my wife. But what you say, Miss Harrington, seems to have upset all my ideas on the subject."

"They were very foolish ideas, Mr. Fletcher, and it is a good thing they are upset," replied Georgie, smiling.

"But take my advice. Go straight to Louise, and ask her about her money. If one item of your informant's news is false, the whole may be."

"Your words are the very essence of kindness, Miss Harrington, and comfort me beyond description. I have never professed to be in love with my wife, but I owe a great deal to her, and we have got on very comfortably together hitherto, and anything like a quarrel between us would give me great pain."

"There must be no quarrel," replied Georgie, decidedly. "I know Louise has always been very proud and fond of you, and will be delighted to welcome you back. Pray go to her at once, Mr. Fletcher. I should not like her to learn you had been to see me first, or she may suspect we have been talking her over. Good-bye. Let me have one line from Boston to say it is all right between you."

And so she quieted the husband's fears and dismissed him, quite willing to take her view of the case, and to listen to any excuses Louise might choose to make for her own conduct. And this happened after Marian Lacy had excited the worst feelings of doubt and jealousy of his wife in Gerard Legh's breast by reading out the letter penned by Louise Fletcher's hand. It is true that when Mrs. Fletcher learned what Georgie had done for her, she felt one or two twinges of conscience for her own treachery, but she was

not brave enough to confess it to the friend she had injured, and so the secret harm went on working unseen, like a mole in the dark, until it threw up a hillock of difficulty.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DIARY.

GEORGIE HARRINGTON did not *see* so much of Mr. Hiram Boch after the interview which took place between them, but she heard that he was in the theater every night, and it was impossible to lose sight of his name.

She could not look at a newspaper without reading some account of him or his doings. Now it was that his beautiful schooner yacht, "Dragon-fly," had taken the international prize; then, that his famous Kentucky trotter, "Lightning," had won the match in Fleetwood Park.

Mr. Hiram Boch's dress at a fancy ball; Mr. Hiram Boch's speech at a citizens' meeting; Mr. Hiram Boch's donation to a public charity; such subjects were cropping up to engage her attention every day.

The young man, by his wealth and liberality, seemed to have become the central planet in New York, round which the lesser satellites revolved.

Miss Harrington had to give up a great deal of pleasure in relinquishing his friendship, and she could not help regretting it. Her delightful rides were over, for she did not care to go out with anybody else. She had lost much of her interest in Mrs. Lousada-Lorens's salons, for no one talked to her so charmingly now as Hiram Boch had done; in fact, she was passing through that phase of feeling which every woman, who has relinquished a pleasure because she thinks it wrong, has done.

Doing right brings its reward in time, but it generally seems long in coming. With the first loss of an enjoyment to which we have been accustomed, all seems barren from Dan to Beersheba, and Georgie often questioned herself whether she had not been *too* strict in declining Mr. Boch's friendship as well as his affection.

But, whatever rules she laid down for herself, she made none for Sissy; she thought it would be hard if the little girl were deprived of so kind a friend as Mr. Boch, so she laid no restrictions on their intercourse.

He had given Sissy a pretty piebald pony, and used to call for her occasionally to take a ride in the park with him, but he did not ask to go upstairs. Sometimes he would come and see her in the evenings, when Georgie was at the theater, but he never stayed until she came home.

Sissy used to comment on Mr. Boch's strange proceedings, and ask her sister for an explanation of them.

"Hiram has been here to-night," she would tell Georgie, in her free, childish way. "It was so tiresome; he came just as you had driven away to the theater, and I wanted him so much to stay till you returned home, but he hadn't time. He brought me a big box of caramels, and he wants to take me to a *matinée* at the Bijou to-morrow; and, Georgie, may I go?"

"Yes, darling, of course you may! Mr. Boch is sure to take good care of you."

"Why do you never see him now, Georgie? He looks so sad when I speak of it. Why don't you ride with him any more, or ask him to come in the afternoons?"

"I have no time for visitors, Sissy dear; I am so often at rehearsal."

"The rehearsals are all over now," said the child. "Are you sick of Hiram, Georgie?"

"What an extraordinary question to ask, Sissy! Am I in the habit of getting sick of my friends?"

"Well, I'm sure there's *something* wrong," remarked Sissy, oracularly, "because Hiram always gets red when I talk about you, and he takes the book with your photographs on his knee when he comes here, and looks at it all the evening."

"Oh, Sissy, you think yourself very clever," replied Georgie, with affected merriment, "but like many would-be wise people, you have only found a mare's nest. Why don't you discover that there's 'something wrong,' as you call it, between Mr. Maxim and me, or General Manvers, or Judge Colesford?"

"Because I know there is not. Whenever you see them you shake hands heartily, and say you're so glad; but when we met poor dear Hiram on Broadway last Thursday you only just bowed, and pretended you were going into a store; and he's a thousand times nicer than any of them. Oh, Georgie, I do so *wish*—"

But here Sissy stopped suddenly.

"What do you wish, dear?"

"I wish Gerard was dead, and you could marry Hiram Boch."

Georgie's face paled to the color of ashes. For the moment she felt as if a knife had run into her heart. Gerard *dead!* The pain she experienced at the mere thought should have shown her the true state of her affections; but with a strong effort she recovered herself, and took refuge in assumed displeasure.

"Sissy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to speak in that way! How often have I told you how wrong it is to wish for any one's death, and you mustn't talk about marrying other gentlemen to me. I am a married woman, and can not even think of such things. Go to Rachel, dear, and tell her to take you out walking; I am tired and want to rest."

"I wish *I* was old enough to marry him," grumbled Sissy. "When you have gone to San Francisco I shall ask him about it. Perhaps he will wait for me."

"Perhaps he will," acquiesced Georgie, laughingly. "But I wouldn't ask him just yet, Sis. People don't like to have to wait too long, and I am not sure if I *am* going to San Francisco."

It had been proposed by Mr. Maxim that, as soon as the New York season was over, he should take Miss Harrington to play in San Francisco, where he expected she would create a great sensation. This trip would entail an extension of her year's engagement, and Georgie had hesitated about signing the contract.

She had now been ten months in America, and she had heard nothing of her husband, except such scraps of information as were conveyed through the letters of Marian Lacy, and they did not tend to give the wife much satisfaction.

Marian seldom mentioned Captain Legh, except to say he was staying at the Mashams', or gone fishing with the Colvilles, or crossed to Paris with the Delmaines.

All people who had professed to be friends of Georgie's, but who had evidently taken advantage of her absence to go over to the other side.

She used to sigh as she perused Marian's letters, and say to herself that she supposed if she ever visited England again she should find that she had not a friend left. Cap-

tain Legh would doubtless make his own story good, and the world is more apt to take the word of the present than to believe in the absent. A living dog is at all times better than a dead lion.

And then the question would arise, why she should contemplate returning to England—at all events for some years to come? If she was not happy in her present condition, she was at least at peace, and there was no necessity for breaking it.

At this juncture came Mr. Maxim's offer for San Francisco, and Georgie was tempted to accept it; but something held her back from renewing her engagement. Metaphorically, she was holding her breath to listen if any sign would reach her from the other side of the Atlantic, and it came in a very unexpected manner.

One evening, on returning home from the theater, she found letters by the English mail laid on her table.

Georgie was very tired. She glanced at the superscriptions hurriedly. There was no handwriting which she recognized, so she threw them carelessly to one side till she had had her supper; then, when Rachel had disrobed her and brushed out her long hair and coiled it up for the night, and left her in a dressing-gown of pink cashmere to lounge on the sofa for a few minutes before retiring to rest, Georgie drew the letters toward her and opened them leisurely.

There was a receipt from her dress-maker for the defrayal of her bill, a note from an ordinary acquaintance, two or three circulars, and an envelope addressed in an illiterate hand, and bearing the postmark of Hull (a town with which she was utterly unacquainted.)

Georgie concluded it was a begging-petition, of which she received a constant supply, and broke the seal, impressed with a thimble, with the utmost indifference; but the contents at once arrested her attention.

Folded in a sheet of white note-paper were four leaves cut from a "Letts' Diary," inscribed, as she saw, in the writing of her husband.

"Can Gerard have sent them to me?" she thought, in a bewildered manner, as she turned them over in her hands.

But a few words, written in red ink at the heading of the first page, soon undeceived her:

"These are sent you by a friend. S. M. stands for Sylvia Marchmont. His diary is full of such entries."

And then Georgie began to read words that made her cheeks flame like fire, and her whole frame tremble. The little sheets of paper were chiefly filled with initials and hieroglyphics, but she understood them all as if they had been written in letters of blood. A woman may forgive unkindness, condone cruelty, and overlook insult; but to know that she is forgotten as soon as her back is turned is more than a woman's nature will bear.

She did not shed a single tear as she locked the sheets in her writing-desk. She did not even wonder *who* had abstracted them from his diary and sent them to her. All she felt was that now she knew the worst, and everything was over between them for evermore.

She went to bed with assumed indifference even to herself; but her heart was aching with a low, dull sense of pain, and she could not sleep. All night long she lay in the dark gazing at an imaginary panorama of pictures that cut her to the quick. Pictures of Sylvia Marchmont, smiling in her youth and beauty, and Gerard Legh bending over her, with not a thought in the mind of either of the woman over the sea they wronged. Pictures, too, of her own past—of scenes of unhappiness—of words of pardon—of promises of amendment that never were fulfilled. And Georgie Harrington felt that she had sacrificed her life to her ideal long enough, and that the time had come when she must think for herself.

She rose in the morning an altered woman. She had been wavering about Mr. Maxim's offer, now she wavered no longer. She had cherished an unconfessed hankering to return to England and have one more interview with her husband—now she felt that if she heard him approaching she must run away. Those entries in the diary had entirely changed the current of her thoughts.

She told Mr. Maxim, the first thing in the morning, that she was ready to go with him to San Francisco, and to play for as long as he thought desirable. She put her name to an agreement for another six months' engagement without the slightest hesitation; and in like manner she went through the task of preparing for her journey, of saying good-bye to her friends, and turning her back on the pleasures and luxuries of New York. She left Sissy and Rachel under the kind care of Mrs. Lousada-Lorens, and started

for several months' absence with more indifference than she had ever evinced before.

During the tedious six days' journey by train she was so absorbed in her own thoughts that the strangers surrounding her decided she was reserved and cold. But if anything is calculated to divert the mind from melancholy, and interest it in passing objects, it is the first view of San Francisco.

On arriving there, Georgie seemed to wake up from her reverie, and thaw to her companions. The atmosphere, the flowers, the fruits, the people, were all so widely different from what she had been accustomed to see, that she appeared to have alighted on a new world and left herself behind her.

The enthusiasm also with which she was received gave her unaffected pleasure. Wherever she appeared she was greeted with shouts of welcome, blossoms seemed to spring up beneath her feet, and the offering of presents became an hourly occurrence.

The Californians paid homage to her talent and beauty by every means they could think of. Invitations poured in upon her from the wealthier residents, and her life was made one long holiday.

"I hope you are satisfied with your success now," said Mr. Maxim to her, gayly. "The seats are all booked for a month in advance, and we are turning away hundreds nightly. If any woman should be happy it is your majesty."

"I am profoundly grateful to them," replied Georgie; "and I think the Californians are the most generous and liberal-hearted people I have ever met. They deserve to make money, because they spend it so freely."

"They would give ten dollars for a rose for you to step on if it would make you happy."

"And they are so delicate in their attentions, too," said Georgie. "I have never found out who it is who has my dressing-room so exquisitely scented with flowers every evening, or who erected the arch of roses at the station when I arrived."

"No more have I," said the manager, dryly.

"Their generosity is extreme," continued Georgie, "and I value it more than I can say. But those quiet little compliments that tell so much, and yet seek for no return, are worth all the rest to me!"

"Perhaps you will find out the name of your secret benefactor before you leave, and think of some means of requiting him," said Mr. Maxim. "Meanwhile, here is an invitation for you from the biggest man in the country—Mr. Llewellyn Thomas, of Rose Valley—to dinner next Sunday. Will you accept it? I can assure you his place is worth seeing; and you won't get such a chance again. Twenty years ago he was the most successful digger in the Sacramento valley, and he is a millionaire. They say he lives in a style that is simply regal."

"Who is asked beside myself, Mr. Maxim?"

"I am, of course. The bear can't be asked out without his leader. And we are requested to bring any members of the company we may choose. They will be left to your selection."

"We must take Miss Addison and Mrs. Hare," said Georgie. "I should not like to go without some ladies. And Mr. Crawley and young Ferdinand Ross."

"Very good, madame. You shall be obeyed."

At that moment a waiter delivered a note and card to her that had been left at the hotel. Georgie glanced at them, and changed color.

"Dear me, how very strange!" she observed. "Lord Frederic Carr is in San Francisco!"

"An English friend of yours, I presume?"

"Scarcely that. He is a friend of Captain Legh's; but I am only just acquainted with him. However, in a foreign land we all seem friends. I wonder what he is doing in San Francisco?"

She opened the note and read it.

"He is traveling for pleasure. He has to leave the town to-day; but returns in a week, and hopes I will receive him then. Now, if he had been an American, he would have sent me a lovely bouquet of flowers with these lines."

"You are getting spoiled, Miss Harrington. You will expect your admirers to empty Covent Garden for you when you return to England."

Georgie sighed.

"Do what they may, they can never rival the American gentlemen in their devotion to our sex. That arch of roses at the station must have cost a lot of money!"

"How that arch of roses haunts you!"

"Yes, to find out who ordered its erection. It was so

beautifully done. There were twelve pink wreaths in front of it, each one with 'G. H.' in the center. And the 'Welcome' was in white roses only. The prettiest thing I ever saw."

"Sounds like New York taste, doesn't it?" said Mr. Maxim.

"Do you think so?" exclaimed Georgie, suddenly. "But why should it not be so?" she added. "They have any amount of money here, and can import taste from all over the world. You will try to find out his name for me, won't you?" she went on, coaxingly, to the manager.

"His name? Perhaps it is a *she*!"

"Oh, no," cried Georgie, laughing, "I don't believe *that*. It may be the offering of a peer or a peasant; but I feel quite certain it is not that of a *she*."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DIGGER'S DINNER.

MR. LLEWELLYN THOMAS, who was noted for being the most successful man who ever went out barefoot to California to seek his fortune, had fallen desperately enamored of the beautiful Miss Harrington, and was anxious she should see everything at its best in Rose Valley.

He was a big, brawny fellow, who did not look much more like a gentleman in his New York suit than he had done in his red flannel shirt, but his good-nature and liberality atoned for his other defects. He was a widower, of about forty years of age, and had been content to remain unmarried, until Georgie Harrington appeared on the San Francisco stage, and turned his thoughts once more in the direction of matrimony.

If she could make up her mind to fix her home in Rose Valley, he thought he would be the very proudest man in California.

And as far as Rose Valley itself was concerned, it might be said to have exceeded in beauty the most ambitious dreams of an earthly residence.

Mr. Thomas had sent two open carriages to convey his guests from San Francisco to his house; and as they wound slowly down the road which led to it, the party could not

restrain their bursts of admiration. On either side the mountainous crags through which the road was cut were clothed with verdure, interspersed with the brilliant blossoms of the West, and with fruit, which hung like enameled jewels from the bough.

"In all my life," cried Georgie, "I never saw such roses; they are larger than peonies. Oh! Mr. Maxim, do ask the coachman to stop and pick one for me. I do not believe it would go into the crown of your hat."

And when the trial was made it was found to be most difficult of accomplishment.

The ladies were in ecstasies; they filled their laps with the gorgeous flowers that grew in luxuriance all over the place, and gave the valley its name, and arrived at the house, looking like one large bouquet of roses.

Mr. Thomas was delighted by Miss Harrington's enthusiasm. He was a man of few words, but his looks betrayed the pleasure he felt at the warm praises she bestowed on everything she saw.

The house was furnished in the most lavish manner; but Georgie had no eyes for anything except the grand scenery by which it was surrounded, and the lovely valley of roses in which it stood. She remained for many minutes on the threshold, drinking in the beauty of the landscape, and congratulating the bashful owner on his possessions.

At last she was induced to turn away, with the ladies who accompanied her, and follow a grinning negress, with a scarlet handkerchief on her head, upstairs to the bedroom which had been selected for their accommodation.

"Miss Harrington!" exclaimed Mrs. Hare, who was making a general inspection, "what is this bedstead made of? It looks as though it was inlaid with ivory."

"Dat is black ebony-wood and seed-pearl," said the grinning negress. "Dat was made for de poor missus, but now she gone."

"Carved ebony, incrustated with seed-pearl!" cried Georgie, examining the bedstead; "who wouldn't be a digger's wife? And after all—she died in it! What base ingratitude!"

"But everything is in the same style, Miss Harrington," said Miss Addison. "Look at these chairs, they are all hand-painted; and the washing-stand is lovely—ebony and brass!"

"Dat am gold," observed the negress.

Georgie, who was washing her hands, started backward, with a comical expression of dismay.

"It makes me quite nervous!" she exclaimed; "I shall be afraid to touch anything! I feel as if I was in a jewel-box."

"Our host is evidently very rich," observed Miss Addison, "and a widower into the bargain; it is really quite interesting."

"A chance for you, my dear," laughed Georgie.

"Oh! I am afraid I'm not the object of his affection, Miss Harrington. Don't forget the dinner was organized in your honor!"

"At any rate, I am very glad we are here, and I mean to enjoy myself. Are we not ready to go down-stairs?"

She led the way to the drawing-room, where their host was waiting to receive them, and threw herself carelessly into a lounging-chair. As soon as ever she pressed the seat there arose the first strains of "Home, sweet home!"

"Oh!" cried Georgie, suddenly, as she jumped up again, and looked round to see whence the sound proceeded.

"Don't be alarmed," said Mr. Thomas; "I should have warned you—it is a musical chair; we have several in the room. Won't you sit down again? You will not find the music disagreeable."

Thus adjured, amidst some tittering, Georgie Harrington resumed her seat, and the air was played out to the close.

"But this is a most wonderful house of yours, Mr. Thomas," she said; "you must have spent an immense deal of money on it."

"What else have I to spend it on, Miss Harrington? I have no wife and no children. Under such circumstances wealth becomes an incumbrance instead of a pleasure."

"You should get some one to share it with you."

"That is my wish," he answered, "but no one likes the Rose Valley well enough to stay here."

"They must be very hard to please," said Georgie.

At that moment dinner was announced, and Mr. Thomas offered her his arm.

The table was furnished with sufficient viands for sixty guests instead of six, and a dozen negro servants served the meal.

Georgie was, of course, placed in the seat of honor at her host's right hand, and he seemed quite disappointed that she could not partake of every dish upon the table. He spoke little, but he looked at her a great deal, and anxiously sought her opinion on the arrangement of his house, and the capabilities of his servants.

It was a sultry day in September, and the evening breeze did not reach them easily in the valley. Toward the close of dinner Georgie looked rather heated, and began to use her fan.

"You are too warm," said Mr. Thomas, anxiously.

"It is a little close," she answered, smiling.

"Are you afraid of the fresh air?"

"On the contrary, I should greatly enjoy it."

"Cæsar," said Mr. Thomas, to one of the colored servants, "open the paneled wall."

In a moment, as if by magic, the side of the room which looked upon the garden was parted in the center and slid back into the recess, and the valley of roses, with the sunset shedding a glow upon its variegated blossoms, appeared in all its beauty before them.

"Oh, how lovely—how exquisite!" cried Georgie, springing from her seat. "This is like fairyland, Mr. Thomas; you have the most beautiful home I think I ever saw. It is a perfect paradise!"

"Without an Eve, Miss Harrington," he said, plaintively.

"Oh! there are plenty of Eves in this world, Mr. Thomas, but I don't believe there is another valley of roses. I shall dream of this place when I am far away from it. I have never seen anything to equal it in my life."

Her host was just about to summon up courage to give her a slight hint on the subject of his thoughts, when a servant brought him a card.

"Ah! my good young friend!" he exclaimed, as he looked at it. "Ladies, will you excuse me one moment, whilst I go and welcome him?"

He rose as he spoke, and was about to leave the room when he was met on the threshold by a man clothed in a suit of velveteen and corduroy, and with a riding-crop in his hand.

Georgie looked round curiously. To her amazement, she beheld Hiram Boch. Her first idea was, that something must have happened in New York. She forgot

entirely that she had received good news of Sissy only the day before.

"You here?" she exclaimed, loudly. "Oh, Mr. Boch, what is the matter? Is anything wrong with my sister?"

In her impetuosity she flew to his side, and grasped his arm.

But Mr. Boch seemed as much taken aback as herself. He glanced at Maxim and murmured:

"You might have warned me of this."

"I do not understand," said Mr. Thomas. "You have the honor, then, of knowing Miss Harrington, Mr. Boch?"

"I am proud to say I have. We were excellent friends in New York, weren't we, Miss Harrington?"

"Yes—yes! But what brings you here?"

"Nothing to do with Sissy, so don't alarm yourself. I am here on business—*pur et simple*. Mr. Thomas is an old chum of mine, as he will tell you, but had I known he had company to-day, I should not have intruded on him."

"My dear sir, why say so? Miss Harrington is the queen of this little feast, and if you are *her* friend that is all-sufficient."

"Then I may sit down, I suppose, and have a glass of wine?" said Hiram Boch, laughing; but he looked white and uneasy all the same.

As for Georgie, her first feelings of fear had given place to wonder.

How long had Mr. Boch been in San Francisco? and why had Mr. Maxim not mentioned the fact to her? And what "business" could have brought him into immediate proximity with them again?

She resumed her seat, but the brightness of her mood had given place to thought and silence.

Every now and then she could feel that Hiram Boch's eyes had stolen her way, and were resting on her; but she would not raise her own. Their sudden meeting had raised a sensation of pleasure in her breast which alarmed her. She told herself it was because he had been so good a friend to her and Sissy, but the feeling made her uneasy all the same. Mr. Thomas tried to tempt her with fruit and wine, but her interest in the banquet was over, and her spirits would not rally.

As soon as dinner was concluded, he proposed an adjournment to the garden, where coffee was to be served

upon the terrace, and the various members of the party were soon dispersed amongst the winding paths.

Hiram Boch found his way to the side of Georgie Harrington.

"You are not going to refuse to speak to me altogether, I hope?" he said, pleadingly. "You are not angry with me for being here?"

"I have no right to be angry," said Georgie; "but I am very much surprised. Why have I not been told that you were in San Francisco? Mr. Maxim evidently knew it. Why did you bind him to secrecy?"

"Because I feared to provoke your displeasure."

"Why should I be displeased at your pursuing your business, whatever it may be? What have I to do with it? But since we were once so intimate—"

"It is because we *were* once so intimate, Georgie, that I am here. Forgive me! I could not help it! I could not live in New York, knowing you were so far away, and that in case of need I could be of no assistance to you."

"You have followed *me*, Mr. Boch?"

"Indeed I have. Who else should I follow? But I never intended to obtrude my presence upon you. I made Maxim promise not to tell you of my proximity; and if it had not been for this unintentional encounter you would have still remained in ignorance that I was near you."

"But what is the use of your going to so much trouble and expense on my account?" said Georgie.

"*What is the use of it?* Do I not see you at the theater every night, and satisfy myself that you are well and prosperous? Am I not at hand in case of anything happening to you (which Heaven forbid!) ready to help you, or be of help to you, as you may see best to employ me?"

Georgie's eyes filled with tears.

"You are very good!" she answered. "I think it was foolish of you to follow me; but I can not reproach you when you speak like that. But I want to save you pain, Mr. Boch, and therefore I would rather you went back to New York and forgot me."

"But I can not forget you, Miss Harrington. I do not wish to forget you. To do you a service, however small—to pay you a trifling honor—is more to me than anything else in the world."

A sudden light broke in upon Georgie.

"Was it you, then," she cried, "that had the arch of roses erected at the station when I arrived? Is it by your orders that my dressing-room is decorated with flowers every night?"

The young man hung his head.

"It has not displeased you, I hope?" he said.

"Displeased me—no. But I am not worth so much trouble on your part, because I can never repay it."

"Don't let us talk of repayment, please," he answered, gayly; "let us admire the beautiful prospect around us instead!"

"Ah, is it not beautiful? I hardly thought such a place could exist on this lower earth. Look at those crimson roses, and that arbor covered with yellow buds! I feel as if I could never tire of gazing at them. This is like a new world to me."

"Can not you make it into a new world, Georgie? Can not you persuade yourself that you have left the old world behind you, and, stepping over its conventionalities, begin a new and happier life in this glorious clime of California?"

"I don't quite understand you, Mr. Boch."

"I am alluding to what we spoke of once in New York; of the advisability of your getting a divorce from your husband, and starting afresh in life on this side of the Atlantic. Of course, I am not speaking altogether unselfishly; you know the hopes I cherish in the event of your becoming free. But if love can atone for the past, you will have a fair chance of happiness in the future."

He bent his handsome face down to hers as he spoke, and Georgie felt very much moved toward him.

"Love is a great temptation," she said, softly; "I can not live without it, and I have missed it so much of late."

"You will not miss it in me," he answered, fervently, "for I have adored you from the first moment we met. Oh! Georgie! trust your fate to me. I will ask you for no promise, nor bind you to any deed, until you are once more free to choose for yourself. But let me put the matter in hand; if you will give me permission I will start for Chicago to-morrow, and obtain every information on the subject. And if the laws of this country can restore your liberty (as I know they can) I will leave you to enjoy it. I will not worry you with entreaties or complaints; I will

wait patiently till you give me some sign that I may speak, and then I will lay everything I possess at your feet."

"You have the spirit of the middle ages in you, Mr. Boch, and you deserve a far better reward than I could ever give you; for though I wish that I had never seen the man who has made me so unhappy, I am afraid that no amount of liberty would restore my peace of mind."

"Not liberty, perhaps, but love! A love like mine would leave you no room for remembrance or regret. Say that you will think of it, Georgie!"

"Yes; I will think of it!" she answered.

Why should she not? she asked herself, as she stood gazing with her sad blue eyes at the lovely scene around her. Why was she to be miserable forever when nature was smiling on every side?

Hiram was right; she had stepped from an old world to a new. The country, the people, the laws, were none of them the same. Was it not only reasonable that in accepting one she should accept the other? What obstacle was there to her agreeing to his offer, and entering on a new life of love and happiness with him?

Only one—a small obstacle—starved for want of proper nourishment, until it scarcely resembled the glad being it had been at its birth; but still living, and making its existence known every now and then by feeble cries and uneasy moans, and long-drawn plaintive sighs—only her love for Gerard Legh.

But Georgie scarcely recognized the child of her heart at this moment. She did not believe in it. She thought that it was dead and buried. So presently she turned her sad eyes upon Hiram Boch, and spoke her mind:

"You are right. It is of no use my thinking further of an irremediable past. I will take your advice and appeal to the laws of America to help me out of this dilemma. And *if* I get free—"

"If you get free?" repeated the young man, with the gladness of hope irradiating every feature of his face.

"I shall not be slow to acknowledge that I owe it all to you," she said, with a soft smile, as she let him take her hand and press it between his own.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEWS FROM HOME.

THE result of Georgie Harrington meeting Mr. Hiram Boch in the Rose Valley was a renewal of the intimacy she had broken off in New York.

The young American now presented himself on every available opportunity, and his addresses grew warmer and more demonstrative each time they met.

Georgie began to feel uncomfortable about it, and reminded him that she was not yet free; and until she received reliable information that it was possible for her to become so, she must ask him to moderate the frequency of his visits.

This hint threw Mr. Boch into a fever of anxiety to procure the necessary details, and, unwilling as he was to leave her, he made preparations at once to travel to Chicago, and consult a lawyer on the subject in person.

"And when I return," he exclaimed, "armed with the instructions how you are to proceed—what then?"

"Will it not be time enough to answer that question when I have seen the instructions?" replied Georgie.

"You are very sanguine on the matter, Mr. Boch, but I can not believe it is possible to get a divorce, even in this country, without witnesses, or the consent of both parties."

"You *have* witnesses," said the young man, eagerly; "you have a friend in New York who knows the shameful way in which you have been treated. You have a letter from your husband, in which he says he never wishes to see you again. And you have your receipts to prove that you have paid for his support for years past. What more can you desire? The fact alone of your being in this country, dependent on yourself, proves the case."

"It may be so," returned Georgie, "but it seems very incredible to me."

"I will show you that it is true," said Hiram Boch, gayly. "I will obtain all the information that is necessary from the first lawyer in Chicago. Perhaps he will recommend your going to Rhode Island. In that case I will journey there myself, to make sure the advice is good. I

will spare no pains, nor time, nor money, Georgie, to set your heart at rest upon this matter."

"It is not worth so much trouble on your part, Mr. Boch."

"It is worth all the world to me, and you know it. Only promise—"

"No! no! I can promise nothing! I should hate myself if I could speculate on a contingency that may never occur. Should I ever be free to do as I choose, Mr. Boch—and I tell you candidly I do not believe in it—then ask me to promise what you will, and I will listen patiently to you, if I can not grant your request."

"I am *sure* you will grant it!" he answered, impressively.

"I do not affect to misunderstand your meaning, my dear friend, but I am not at all sure. My brain is in a whirl when I think of it. It is awful that there should be any change in a life that seemed so settled. And sometimes I feel that, if all were over with my present marriage, I should have no courage to enter upon another."

"I will not have you feel so," he replied. "The preliminaries in such a case are necessarily painful, but you need not dread the publicity that you would encounter, under similar circumstances, in England. You can have no idea how rapidly and quietly we run these little matters through out here. And surely, Georgie, if you get free, you would never condemn yourself to a future of loneliness? It would be too unnatural!"

"How can I be lonely, leading the life I do?" she questioned.

"Then I should have said a future of lovelessness, which, with your youth and beauty, would be more unnatural still. Tell me you will never condemn yourself to such a lot!"

"If I chose it, it would be no condemnation."

"Have you no pity, then, for me?" he cried.

"So much pity, my dear friend, and so much consideration, that I would never accept the devotion of your life unless I could return it in adequate measure. Can't you understand me, Mr. Boch? My heart is still too sore for consolation. My pride has been so much wounded—my disappointment is so keen that I distrust myself and my own judgment. You will be patient with me, I am sure.

Even if I do not avail myself at once of all the trouble you are taking for me, you will know I am not ungrateful. In time, perhaps, I may show you I am mindful of it—but just now I can't—I *can't*."

He looked disappointed, but did not press her further.

"I feel sure that whatever you decide on doing will be best," he answered; "and whenever, and in whatever way, I can assist you I always will. My affection for you would be worth very little if it could not promise that. But I shall not relinquish my present task. I shall go to Chicago, and satisfy myself that I have not misled you with false hopes."

"I shall be glad to know exactly how I stand," said Georgie.

The encouragement was feeble, but Hiram Boch did not waver from his purpose. He started for Chicago the following day, and Georgie felt a sensible relief at his departure.

While he was away she could think of his attachment for her with a certain amount of pride, and sigh that she was unable to return it; but directly he came into her presence she shrunk from him with that feeling of guilt which every woman must experience who encourages, however silently, the hopes which she never expects to be able to fulfill.

As soon as Mr. Boch was gone she applied herself with renewed energy to the duties of her profession, and became a greater favorite than ever in San Francisco.

About a week after the dinner in Rose Valley she received a very modest, though practical, offer of marriage from Mr. Llewellyn Thomas, who inclosed a schedule of his various investments, speculations, and receipts for her satisfaction.

This was a breaking heart over which Georgie could afford to laugh, and it afforded her great amusement. The only sigh she gave to it was when she remembered that her answer must shut her out from the beauties of Rose Valley forever.

Why couldn't the man have let her enjoy his enviable possessions until she was on the point of leaving them, instead of spoiling everything as soon as she became acquainted with him?

The letter had to be answered, however, and it quenched poor Mr. Thomas's aspirations at once.

But Georgie said nothing of her husband in it. She merely declined with thanks. She had begun to feel shy of mentioning the fact of her marriage in the New World. The announcement invariably entailed so much questioning, surprise, and deprecation, that it was more than she could stand. So (excepting to Lord Frederic Carr) she held her tongue about it altogether.

This gentleman had called upon her shortly after Hiram Boch's departure for Chicago. He had only been an acquaintance of hers in England—one of Captain Legh's club-friends—but the acquaintanceship developed wonderfully from the moment of their meeting in California. The fact being that Gerard Legh was of a very jealous temperament, and Georgie had never given much encouragement to his male friends to visit her. Neither did she feel inclined to accord it to Lord Frederic now.

He was one of those rather free-spoken "haw-haw!" swells, who imagine, because a woman is an actress or married, that they can talk to her as they like. And Georgie dreaded hearing something from his lips about Gerard.

The extracts which she had read from her husband's diary were rankling in her heart like a poisoned barb in a flesh-wound, although her pride forbade her confessing the pain they gave her.

She had tried to argue with herself that it was no longer any consequence to her what he said or did, or with whom he associated; but the sensitiveness with which she shrunk from the remembrance exposed the deception.

Lord Frederic Carr had lately left England on a trip of pleasure to the West. He had seen Gerard to the last, and probably knew all his associates, and had partaken of his pleasures; and while he lounged on her sofa, entertaining her with small talk and indulging in reminiscences of the past, Georgie sat on thorns lest the next sentence should introduce the name of a rival or reveal some act of which she had not yet heard.

But Lord Frederic was not the person to take a hint easily. He was a very important being in his own estimation, and considered Miss Harrington a lady to be envied for enjoying the distinction of his acquaintanceship. Being of a frugal turn of mind, he did not offer her any valuable presents, but he called at her hotel regularly every afternoon, and was generally to be met behind the scenes

at night, and the name of Captain Legh was very often on his lips.

"It is a curious coincidence, Miss Harrington," he said, one day, "that your husband was the last person I saw in London. There was a wine-party at Cleveland's the night before, and we didn't break up till about five o'clock in the morning, and I had to start at eight for Liverpool; and so Legh, and Sampson, and two or three other fellows volunteered to see me off. I didn't want them to do so, for (saving your presence), they were awfully 'screwed,' but they *would* come, and Legh was the last face I saw as the train moved off."

"How very interesting," said Georgie. "They must have presented an edifying spectacle at eight o'clock in the morning."

"Now, Miss Harrington, you mustn't be too hard upon them, for we had been keeping it up, I assure you, and—"

"Don't trouble yourself to find excuses for them, Lord Frederic. It is nothing out of the way. I have not been married three years without learning so much."

"Of course not, and all men are the same, you know. Now, about these American fellars; what do you think of them, Miss Harrington? Aren't they very inferior to our fellars? They drink shockingly, you know; the bars are always full of them, and they have quite an extraordinary idea of dress. Met a man the other day walking down the town with a crimson neck-tie and a plush waistcoat. Strikes one as rather unusual, doesn't it now?"

"I suppose it would be difficult to visit any foreign nation without observing habits that strike us as unusual, Lord Frederic."

"Aw! but I don't mean only that, you know, Miss Harrington. Come now, you must have seen plenty of them in New York. They were buzzing round you like bees all the time, I know. And didn't they strike you as—well—as very unlike *us*, you know?"

"Very unlike, Lord Frederic!"

"You're a woman of observation, and I felt sure you would say so; not the same style, eh?"

"A totally different style; if they dissipate, they don't boast of it before women; if they are angry they don't insult them; if they are married men they keep their peccadil-

loes to themselves. From this point of view I find them very different."

"Aw! I see how it is, Miss Harrington; they were all 'mashed' on you, and so you won't say a word against them. Now, don't deny it, for it's true, and I'm mum, you know; not a word to Legh when I get back, though I don't suppose he expected anything else when you came out here."

"Do you go back soon?" asked Georgie, wishing to change the conversation.

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied his lordship, with his glass in his eye. "I only came over on pleasure, and my time is my own, so I shall not return till I've had enough of it; but I expect that will be the case before Christmas. By the way, Legh promised to spend Christmas down at Suddeley Park with my people. I thought it would do the poor beggar good to have a run in the country. He was looking awfully ill when I left."

"Gerard ill!" exclaimed Georgie, startled by the intelligence.

"By Jove, yes! I thought he would have told you. As thin as a lath and as yellow as a guinea. Expect he's been living a little too fast since you left him, Miss Harrington. Husbands will do it, you know, sometimes, when they're deprived of all their home comforts."

"Captain Legh can scarcely be said to be in that predicament," said Georgie, coldly. "He has a comfortable house and good servants, to say nothing of having his father's place, Summerhayes, to visit when he chooses."

"Oh! I don't fancy Legh troubles Summerhayes much," replied Lord Frederic; "they're too starched there to suit him; and I dare say Miss Lacy does all she can to make his home comfortable; but he's awfully hard up, and she can hardly replace *you*, you know!"

"*Miss Lacy!*" repeated Georgie. "What has she to do with Captain Legh?"

For Marian had carefully avoided mentioning her change of residence in her letters to her cousin.

"Why, surely you must know that she and her mother are keeping house for Legh. And a good arrangement I thought it. But it doesn't seem to have turned out a success, for he sleeps half the nights of the week in chambers."

"It is strange I should not have heard of this from Marian," said Georgie; "but it really is of little consequence to me so long as it suits Gerard."

"I mentioned to Miss Lacy how ill Legh looked," continued Lord Frederic, "the last time I saw her; but she laughed at the idea. It is true though, Miss Harrington! All the men in town noticed the change in him; and I think the sooner you go home again the better. When does your engagement out here end?"

"My engagement is an indefinite one," said Georgie, with an assumption of indifference, "and can be extended according to my own pleasure. I always meant to stay out in the country some time, and should not dream of returning to England without due cause. If Captain Legh is ill why have I not been told of it?"

"That I can't venture to say," replied her companion, "and I am sorry if I have made you anxious; but I only tell you what every one talks about. Even Lord Kinlock told me he had never seen his son look so pulled down before."

"I dare say the cold weather will set him up again," said Georgie, cheerfully. "What sort of a winter are they having at home? Have you heard?" And thereupon they drifted into subjects totally irrelevant to Captain Legh; and Lord Frederic Carr left the presence of the beautiful Miss Harrington, convinced that she was one of the coldest, most hard-hearted women that he had ever met.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MODERN HERO.

It was the first time that Miss Harrington had played "The Siren" in San Francisco, and she had taken the house by storm. The third act, in which she did not appear, was on the stage, and she was lying down on a sofa in her dressing-room to rest herself before she went on again. Her dresser was fussing about the room, shaking out and hanging up the costumes she had already worn, and preparing the one she was about to assume. Her tongue, after the manner of the tongues of dressers, never ceased to wag as she pursued her occupation, and talked of this lady's generosity and that one's meanness.

But Georgie Harrington was not listening to a word she said. She lay on her couch, with one hand pressed against her brow as if she would stifle the thoughts that oppressed her.

The new triumph she had achieved, and the applause that had greeted her, were forgotten as soon as they had passed. Mr. Maxim had met her at the wings with an affected lamentation that, at this rate, they should not get out of San Francisco for the next six months; and she had smiled and looked gratified, though in reality she didn't care two straws about it.

Her head ached, and her heart would have ached in unison with it, if she had felt that she had a heart at all; but for Georgie Harrington the world seemed suddenly to have lost all its interest. The excitement of her novel position was over, and everything seemed dark and uncertain. She felt as if she had lost her way, as if she could never go back, and there was nothing to be gained by advancing.

Hiram Boch had now been absent for a month, but he had written her several letters full of hope in the possibility of clearing the path before her. Every difficulty was being overcome in the most wonderful manner, and in a short time he expected to be able to report that he was ready for action. He did not obtrude the mention of the reward he looked for upon her; but she knew what it was, and the nearer it came the more it lessened in value.

What should she say to him when he came back? How she wished she had never lent her sanction to his proceeding on a quixotic errand which could end in nothing but disappointment for him!

As bitter thoughts pressed in upon her mind, and made her contract her brows with pain, Georgie Harrington tried to persuade herself they were all given to Hiram Boch and his wasted energies. Nothing would have made her confess they were the offspring of the news Lord Frederic Carr had told her, and that the idea of Captain Legh looking "awfully ill," and being "awfully hard up," haunted her night and day, to say nothing of an extra pang whenever she remembered that Marian Lacy was ministering to his daily comfort, and taking *her* place at the head of his household.

Georgie had no reason that she knew of to doubt her

cousin's fidelity to herself. Marian had always professed to be one of her truest friends; and doubtless, if Lord Frederic's statement was correct, she had accepted the charge of Gerard's *ménage* as much out of kindness to one as the other. But Georgie could not understand why she had been kept in the dark concerning it. And why had not Marian informed her of her husband's illness?

She had never mentioned him excepting in connection with some merry-making—with being at theaters, races, or balls—things of little moment perhaps, but which had planted an extra sting in Georgie's remembrance of him.

The applause of the audience still continued; the third act was drawing to a close. It was time for her to dress for her last appearance. She dragged herself wearily off the couch at the dresser's demand, and submitted to be clothed in a long white clinging garment that made her look like a Grecian statue. Just as she was ready there was a knock at the door, and Lord Frederic's card was presented to her.

"I can not see him," she answered, fretfully. "Tell his lordship I am dressing."

But in another minute, when she issued from her room, she found him propped up against the wall outside.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you," he said, "but I only wanted to tell you how sorry I was to hear the news."

"What news?"

"The report from England about Legh. It may be exaggerated, you know, but doubtless you have heard direct. Is Miss Lacy with him?"

Georgie felt her heart grow cold.

"I don't know what you allude to," she uttered, faintly! "I have heard nothing. What is it? Don't keep me in suspense."

"Perhaps I had better not tell you, if you've heard nothing," said Lord Frederic, stupidly.

"Yes, yes, you must. I insist upon knowing. How could I go on the stage in this state of uncertainty? Tell me at once, Lord Frederic. Is anything wrong?"

"Well, he's got typhoid down at Hatleigh; at least so my sister, Mrs. Raynor, says. He was to have spent Christmas at Suddeley Park, as I told you, but he's had to put it off,"

"Is he—is he *dangerously* ill?" she asked, with pallid lips.

Lord Frederic looked anxious.

"I wish I hadn't told you," he muttered. "You oughtn't to have pressed me, Miss Harrington, but I thought some one would have sent you the news."

"Of course, I shall hear to-morrow; but I must know the truth to-night. Did Mrs. Raynor say my husband was *dangerously* ill?"

"Well, he was bad enough when she wrote; but that's a fortnight or three weeks ago, and I dare say he's as right as a trivet now. You mustn't look like that, Miss Harrington. You frighten me, upon my word you do. Let me fetch you a glass of wine, or something. You can't go on the stage like that. You look as if you were going to faint."

"No, no, I am not going to faint!" replied Georgie, pushing past him. "Thank you for telling me. There is my call! I must go," and she disappeared upon the stage.

"By Jove!" thought Lord Frederic, left behind, "I wish I had bitten out my tongue before I was such a fool as to let it out. How her face changed as she heard it! She must care for the beggar after all. I must go and see how she pulls through her part."

And he took up his station at the wings, and watched her narrowly. She did not seem to let the news she had received affect her acting. She was just as impassioned and as forcible as she had been before. Once or twice, as the action of the play brought her near to the wing, Lord Frederic thought he could discern real tears upon her face; but if so they only rendered her personation of the Siren more natural, and the delight of the spectators rose with the occasion. At last it was over.

Mr. Llewellyn Thomas, faithful under dismissal, threw her a bouquet of the Valley roses, with a diamond ring concealed in it worth five thousand dollars. Minor compliments followed, until the stage was covered with floral trophies. The *jeune premier* had to lead her on three or four times before the curtain, and then she was left in peace to seek her own apartment. As she passed Lord Frederic Carr he was shocked to see how haggard her

countenance had suddenly become. He advanced to speak to her, but she waved him back imperiously.

"Leave me alone," she said, quickly—"leave me alone. I can bear it best by myself."

She disrobed and got into her carriage as quietly as she could, scarcely any one but the employes seeing her leave the theater. A crowd was assembled at the stage-door to see her come out, but she was so muffled up they could not discern her features.

"Put up your veil! We want to see your pretty face!" cried a rough, but good-natured by-stander.

At another time Georgie would have laughed at the boorish request and complied with it, but to-night she pulled up the windows of her carriage, and cowered back upon the cushions as if she were desirous to hide herself from view. Her brain was burning; her frame was trembling; for her heart echoed continually that one sentence, "*dangerously ill of typhoid fever.*" Her vivid imagination supplied all the rest. A month ago he had been dangerously ill. To-day he was dead and buried—hidden out of her sight, beyond the reach of pardon and peace forever. By the time the vehicle drew up at the hotel door she had worked herself up to a pitch of hysteria. The unnatural restraint she had been compelled to put on herself in public would have its revenge.

As she reached her private rooms, which were divided by a velvet *portière*, she felt that her endurance had reached its limit, and throwing herself headlong upon a couch, she burst into a flood of tears. Some one waiting for her return in the back room first started at the sound, and then rose quickly to inquire into its cause.

It was Mr. Boch, who had returned from Chicago that evening, and was anxious to report the progress he had made to her. But her evident distress made him forget everything but itself.

"Georgie," he exclaimed, "are you ill? What has occurred to upset you?"

"Oh, Mr. Boch, is that you? I am so utterly—*utterly* miserable!"

She rose as she spoke and tried to dry her streaming eyes, but her hand shook so she could hardly help herself.

"You distress me infinitely," said Hiram Boch; "and I hoped we should have such a happy meeting. I have

traveled night and day to get here a little earlier, but I would not disturb you at the theater. What is the matter? Any bad news from England? Is your husband going to join you?"

"Oh, no, no; I wish he could. He is ill, Mr. Boch. Lord Frederic Carr heard it in a letter from his sister. My husband is dangerously ill of typhoid fever. By this time he may be dead and buried. He has not been well for months," she went on, catching her breath, "and no one has had the grace to let me know of it. And now he has taken this fever at the very worst time. I scarcely dare think what may have happened to him. And I am chained here—chained like a dog, without the power to get away. Oh, what *shall* I do? What *shall* I do?"

"What do you *want* to do?" asked Mr. Boch.

It was only by a tremendous effort of will that he could address her quietly. He had arrived that evening full of hope and joyful anticipations. He was laden with proofs of the facility with which she could procure a divorce from the man whose possible danger had the power to provoke this access of grief on her part. What use were they now? He did not even dare to allude to the errand he had been engaged upon. He could only listen with a cold and sinking heart to her lamentations.

"What *can* you do?" he continued, slowly. "If (as you surmise) Captain Legh's illness may have terminated fatally, there is nothing to be done. And if he has recovered from it, he can not need your assistance, even if he would accept it. The best thing to be done is to send a telegram to inquire the result. Will that satisfy you?"

"*Satisfy me!* Oh, how cruel you are!" cried Georgie. "How can anything *satisfy* me while this miserable state of things exists between us? Can't you see? Can't you understand? If he dies now—if he is dead—nothing can ever make me happy in this world again. It is all very well to talk, but he is my husband. No one can ever be so dear to me as he has been; and if we never meet again I shall kill myself!"

In the intense selfishness of love she entirely forgot the feelings of the man by her side who had gone forth joyfully to seek the means which should bring him nearer to herself, and had come back to hear for the first time the real sentiments she cherished. As her words fell on his ear Hiram

Boch moved a little further from her side, and regarded her with sorrowful amazement.

"Do you mean to tell me, then, that you *love* this man?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Oh! yes, yes! Have you not guessed it? If I had *not* loved him, do you think I should have held aloof from you as I have done?"

"But think how he has injured you, Miss Harrington. I am not speaking now for myself, but for you; how he has insulted and abused you! Think of his indifference—his neglect—and ask yourself what consideration he deserves at your hands now!"

"I know it! I have thought of it! The remembrance has nearly driven me mad. But it was as much my fault as his. I aggravated and irritated him. He is not a good temper, and I have been inconsiderate of his failings; how I hate myself for it now!"

"I am sure you have nothing to reproach yourself with," returned Mr. Boch, earnestly. "You must have been only too good and gentle with him. It is this unfortunate news that has made you so sensitive; you will think differently to-morrow."

"Indeed I shall not! And if he is gone—Oh! Gerard!" she cried, relapsing into tears.

"Let me at least set your mind at rest on this subject," replied Hiram Boch. "I will go to the night telegraph office, and send a message to London at once. What is Captain Legh's address?"

"Oh! how good you are! Here is the address on my card. But if—if the answer should be what I dread!"

"Then you will at least know the worst," he replied, as he sallied forth to send the message, with a sincere prayer that the reply might be favorable to his wishes.

Georgie spent a miserable night, full of hopes and fears, but no answer was returned to the telegram.

The next day passed in the same painful suspense, and by the close of it she had worked herself up to such a state of alarm that her condition was pitiable, and Mr. Boch saw that if she had no relief her strength would give way.

"What do you want to do?" he reiterated.

"I must go to England," replied Georgie, in a hollow voice. "I feel sure that he is dead, or he would have sent an answer to my telegram. I can not bear the suspense,

Mr. Boch, it is killing me by inches. I must throw up my engagement and go home at once."

"You can't do that without Maxim's consent, and I very much doubt if he will give it. You are under legal contract to him, remember."

"What shall I do?" she exclaimed, in a tone of despair.

"Mr. Boch, you are very powerful, and you are my friend. Pray go to Mr. Maxim and beg him to release me. I will forfeit any amount he chooses if he will only let me go. I have worked for him faithfully till now, but I can work no longer. If he insists upon retaining my services, he will regret it, for my strength and my brain are failing, and I can not do justice to myself."

In her wild misery Georgie Harrington scarcely appreciated the extent of the sacrifice she was asking at the hands of her admirer; but the young American, with the nobility of a hero, accepted the task she set him, and went at once to broach the proposal to Mr. Maxim.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOMeward BOUND.

As may be supposed, the manager's first move was to refuse altogether to entertain so ridiculous an idea. He thought Georgie Harrington must be insane to have asked it, and Mr. Boch a little worse than herself to have offered to be her messenger. To allow her to throw up her engagement, and go home at the very moment when he was actually *coining* money through means of her! He had never heard of such a thing!

"Not a bit of it," he said, stoutly; "Miss Harrington is under contract to me for four months longer, and I don't let her off a single day. And she must be mad, sir, to wish for such a thing! Why, I could make that woman's fortune! If she would sign a five years' engagement with me I would send her home at the end of the time with more money than she would know what to do with. She's the greatest success I've ever had in my hands! And now to want to run away from me because that rascal she's tied to has a finger-ache, or some such rubbish! I won't hear of it; and if you were her friend, sir, you would not encourage her in such folly!"

"I'm sure I don't want her to go," replied Hiram Boch, ruefully. "But you don't understand the case, Mr. Maxim. Miss Harrington is almost beside herself. Like all people with very highly strung organizations, she has collapsed entirely under the shock. The doctor says she is threatened with brain fever, and he will not answer for the consequences if she goes on working under so unnatural a strain."

"Pooh! pooh! pooh!" said Maxim, "she won't break down while she has anything to do. She worked well enough in England while that fellow was bullying her night and day. Work is the best thing for her; it will keep her from fretting!"

"But it is the suspense and uncertainty, Mr. Maxim, that are likely to do her harm. We have telegraphed twice to London to ask how Captain Legh is going on, without receiving any reply. And his wife concludes from this circumstance that he must be dead."

"And a good job, too!" exclaimed Maxim.

"Perhaps I agree with you," said Boch, sighing, "but we can't make *her* think so!"

"Do you mean to tell me she cares for the brute?"

"So it would appear! If you saw the state of mind she is in you would say she did. She barely pulled through her business last night. You must have seen that for yourself! And I can not imagine how she will do it this evening; she seems scarcely able to drag her feet along the ground. And what good will it do you, Mr. Maxim, if she falls ill, and is unable to appear at all?"

"What the dickens does she want?" grumbled the manager.

"She asks to be released from her engagement at the price of any forfeit, and allowed to return to England to see after her husband. That is the plain English of it. And I offer myself as guarantee that any loss you may suffer by the arrangement will be made up to you!"

The fact of Mr. Boch's enormous wealth being too well known to be disputed, Mr. Maxim condescended, at this juncture, to consider whether it might not be better worth his while to consent to the proposal.

"But perhaps you don't know what I'm making by her, sir," he replied. "We are turning hundreds away from the doors nightly, and I've coined more money since Miss

Harrington joined me in a week than I could have done in a month with any one else!"

"All the greater reason that you should be indulgent to her in a time like this, Mr. Maxim! Besides, it is not as if she wished to leave you for another manager. She only asks a few months' leave, and offers to recoup all losses you may incur by it, and I really don't see why you should refuse!"

"Suppose I put my share of the losses down at two thousand dollars a week, Mr. Boch—what then?"

"I think it's high, but it shall be paid you!" replied the young man.

"Will Miss Harrington give me a guarantee to that effect?"

"I will answer for her that she will."

"And an agreement that her next engagement shall be mine, whether in England or America?"

"No! no! Now you are going too far! If Miss Harrington defrays your possible losses by the rupture of her present engagement, I deny that you have any further claim on her. If she consents to enter into any agreement with you for the future, you must considerably lower the immediate demands you make upon her purse, Mr. Maxim!"

Mr. Boch, although a millionaire, and the most liberal of men, knew the value of money, and was not going to let Georgie or himself be cheated out of it.

"You see," he went on, in a subdued tone, "a dozen things may crop up to alter her plans. If Captain Legh is dead she may not wish to return to the stage. If he is living—they—they may make their quarrels up again, and she may not consent to leave him. At any rate, she should be free to decide for herself."

The manager was still unwilling to come to a compromise.

"I really don't see my way to do it," he said, roughly. "I can't break faith with the public like a woman. I have a reputation to maintain, and what I promise I perform. Miss Harrington is bound to remain with me for the next four months, and remain she must!"

Hiram Boch was nettled.

Under his disappointment Mr. Seth Maxim seemed suddenly to have changed his character, and bound on making as good a bargain as he could.

"Look here, then, Maxim," he said, "Miss Harrington will go whether you like it or not; and I shall escort her to New York! You can bring an action against her for breaking her contract, but you can not prevent her leaving San Francisco, and she has quite made up her mind to return to England. It is for you to decide, therefore, whether it will be most to your advantage to rush into law, and to take what damages the court may assign you, or to accept Miss Harrington's very liberal offer to pay you any forfeit, in reason, which you may choose to impose on her."

Mr. Maxim, having already had some experience of warring against women in a country which is invariably on the side of the fair sex, thought it would be wiser to close at once.

"Well, I will accept the terms, then, Mr. Boch. I don't wish to be hard on Miss Harrington, but I expected the profits to rise every week, and I can't put them down at less than the sum I mentioned—two thousand dollars a week."

"For sixteen weeks?" said Hiram Boch.

"For sixteen weeks, sir."

"It shall be paid you to-morrow, Mr. Maxim. Meanwhile you had better see about getting out your bills to announce her non-appearance. Put it down to sudden illness. You never made a truer excuse in your life."

The young American walked back to the hotel and told Georgie Harrington that the manager had consented to let her off the remainder of her engagement on a forfeit of two thousand dollars. Grief had made her so apathetic that she did not even notice that the demand was very small. She drew the check with a trembling hand, and asked Mr. Boch to add one more to his many acts of friendliness by settling the matter with Mr. Maxim for her, which he did without another word.

Then Georgie made a terrible effort, and pulled herself together for her last appearance. But even the audience could see that she was ill, and hardly able to get through the part. They applauded her warmly to keep up her courage, but their manifestations were of a friendly rather than a congratulatory character.

"If I made many more such appearances," she said to Maxim, with a ghastly smile, as she came off, "I should lose all the prestige I have gained."

And he answered:

"Get home as quickly as you can, Miss Harrington. I see now that you are really ill."

"You have been very good to me, Mr. Maxim," she murmured, "and if ever I can make it up to you in the future I will."

"Yes, yes, Maxim knows all that," interposed Hiram Boch, hurriedly. He had been hovering around all the evening, dreading lest there should be an explanation between them by which Georgie should discover the share he had taken in the settlement of her business affairs. "Here is your dresser, Miss Harrington. Now get as soon as you can to your room, and I will wait to see you home."

In like manner he arranged everything for her traveling back to New York, telegraphed to Mrs. Lousada-Lorens to say she was on the road, and accompanied her to her destination.

Georgie was infinitely grateful to him, but she was not in the mood to show her gratitude. She sat like a statue in the train, and only eat and drank when food was forced upon her. They had given the same excuse to Mrs. Lousada-Lorens that the public had been compelled to accept from her, namely, that sudden illness was the reason of her unexpected return. But when she reached New York, and met her friends face to face, she found it impossible to keep up the deception. And as they learned the truth everybody turned, so it seemed to Georgie, against her.

Mrs. Lousada-Lorens was loud in declaiming against the step she was taking. To throw up all her brilliant prospects, to abandon her American career at the very commencement, and in order to return to a man who had so ill-used her! It was not only wicked, it was degrading; and in her indignation Mrs. Lousada-Lorens went so far as to declare she would never speak to her again if she persisted in her determination.

Louise Fletcher was not so vehement as the American lady; but she argued incessantly with Georgie against her design. "What was the use," she plaintively demanded, "of her going back to a man who didn't want her? They could never be happy together. Georgie knew what his temper was. Did she suppose he was likely to alter? They would not live together three months; and the second separation would be much worse than the first."

Even Sissy cried when she heard they were going home again, and Rachel looked grave, and neither of them displayed the least sympathy for the master of the house, lying smitten down with so sore a sickness.

But Georgie was resolute, and nothing they could say or do shook her determination. She had written to Captain Legh from San Francisco, just a few simple lines, to tell him she was coming:

“DEAR GERARD,—I have just heard that you are ill, and I am coming home by the Cunard steamer of the fifteenth of November. I have thrown up my engagement, and a kind friend of mine here has seen to all the arrangements for my return. Pray send a line to Queenstown to tell me your present address, and I will join you there.

“Believe me,

“Your affectionate wife,

“G. HARRINGTON-LEGH.”

She believed that this letter (if it ever reached him) would tell Gerard all she wished him to know. She thought that he must guess, from the mere fact of her writing after so long a silence, that she was desirous to ignore the past, and begin her married life over again with him.

She calculated that her letter would arrive in England a week before herself, and she almost expected that her husband would meet her at Queenstown instead of writing, as she had desired him to do.

They had been separated for more than a year. Surely, with reflection must have come a calmer judgment if not repentance, and Gerard would be as glad to sign a treaty of peace as herself.

“If—that was to say—if he lived to receive her. Oh, how that dreadful “if” intruded on all her pleasurable anticipations! Had it not been for the doubt of her husband being still in existence she would have looked forward to a certain reconciliation. For she had forgotten everything—his treatment of her in the past, the proofs she held of his conduct in the present—in the knowledge that he was ill and she was not there to nurse him.

The preparations for her departure proceeded rapidly, and at the last moment she found that Louise Fletcher intended to cross in the same steamer.

Notwithstanding Georgie's advocacy, Mrs. Fletcher had

had some unpleasant scenes with her husband respecting Mr. Charlie Randall, which had resulted in Mr. Fletcher declaring she must either travel on tour with him or return to England.

A few months ago Georgie would have been as pleased with this arrangement as she was at the news that they were to be companions on the voyage out; now she seemed quite indifferent whether Louise accompanied her or not.

Perhaps the person on whom her unusual mood fell hardest was Hiram Boch, who longed so much to keep her in America and yet had been the primary agent for her leaving it.

In days to come Georgie would recall and be grateful for the trouble he took for her on the occasion, and the noble unselfishness with which he thrust himself and his own feelings in the background, and thought only of the wishes and comfort of the woman he loved. But now she shrunk from him almost guiltily, as she thought that she had even contemplated the possibility of putting him in Gerard's stead.

Even as he wished her farewell on board the steamer she could only thank him with a deep sigh for all he had done for her, and had not one word of hope to give him for the future. But he hid his disappointment bravely, and would not let her see how much it hurt him.

He stood on the wharf, watching the steamer put out to sea with the expression of a man who sees his best possessions sink beneath the waves; and when she was a speck in the distance he turned away with a dry eye and a careless laugh, and rushed wildly about New York to see what new dissipation he could find wherewith to distract his memory from dwelling on the past.

There was not a truer hero living than this American gentleman, whom the world believed to cherish no deeper ambition than was evoked by yachts and race-horses.

The voyage was a quick and prosperous one, and at the appointed time they reached Queenstown.

Georgie was all excitement and anticipation. She could not, *would* not believe that her husband was dead until she read the fatal announcement in black and white; and, as if to reward her faith, a letter in his familiar writing was put into her hand as soon as the tender came alongside.

"Thank Heaven," she cried, hysterically, as she re-

ceived it, "he is safe and well! All will be right between us now!"

She would not trust herself to peruse it in public, but ran, with a fast-beating heart, to the shelter of her cabin, and, tearing open the envelope, seized the sheet of paper it contained, and read as follows:

"I am surprised beyond measure at the communication which I have received from you. After having left me for more than a twelvemonth to shift for myself you now offer to return to live with me. *I decline the offer.* I have let my house and am living in chambers—*where*, it is quite unnecessary for you to know. I do not misunderstand the intentions of the '*kind friend*' who accompanied you to New York. It is not the first time he has been brought under my notice. The best advice I can give you is to go back to him, as there is certainly no welcome for you here.

"G. LEGH."

The letter was written on his club paper, and that was all the clew he gave her.

CHAPTER XXV.

GOING TOO FAR.

CAPTAIN LEGH had let his house in consequence of having a serious dispute with Marian Lacy. The young lady had exceeded her privileges. Ceasing to interest herself exclusively in the making of coffee and buttering of toast, she took to questioning Georgie's husband rather sharply as to where he had been and whom he had seen, and, from being a confidante, transformed herself into a mentor; and this was a sort of espionage which Gerard Legh had ever been impatient of, even with those who had a right to inquire into his private affairs. It may be supposed, therefore, that he was not likely to gratify Miss Lacy's curiosity.

One morning he told her cursorily that he was invited to Hatleigh House to stay with Lord and Lady Henry Masham, and should proceed there the following week.

"For long?" asked Marian.

"I don't know; it depends upon whether I am bored or not. Lady Henry has some private theatricals in her head, I believe, and the party may prove a pleasant one."

"How charming!" exclaimed Miss Lacy, enthusiastically. "I know of nothing more delightful than theatricals in a country house; they bring people together, and make them so sociable—a common bond that interests them all!"

"I expect I shall be more interested in the birds than the theatricals!" grumbled Captain Legh. "I've seen too much of the real thing to care about the imitation: and I begin to loathe the very name of a theater and everything connected with it!" he added, fiercely.

"How I do wish—" commenced Marian.

"What do you wish?"

She stopped short, hardly daring to tell him.

It was the dream of her life to be invited down to Hatleigh and meet all the big people who assembled there; and she had hoped that her proximity to Gerard Legh might procure her this pleasure. But nothing had been done toward it yet.

Lady Henry's first visit to the house was her last, and the result of it lay in the present fact, that Captain Legh had received an invitation to join their autumn party, and not a hint had been dropped concerning Miss Lacy.

"Why can't you say a thing straight out?" continued Captain Legh, rather brusquely. "I hate beating about the bush."

"Well, then, I wish I could go to Hatleigh with you."

"Oh, that's it! I don't suppose you'd enjoy yourself much though, for they're all strangers to you."

"I should soon make friends with them."

"You *might*. But it's not always so easy. People of that class are apt to look askance at any one not moving in their own set."

"They used to be friendly enough with Georgie."

"That was different. They kow-towed to her on account of her reputation."

"Couldn't *you* get me an invitation, Gerard?"

Captain Legh looked annoyed.

"Impossible! I don't know Lady Henry well enough."

"I thought you were so intimate with them?"

"You may be intimate with people without having the audacity to dictate what names they shall include in their invitation-list. Besides, when Lady Henry has private theatricals she only asks those guests who take part in the play."

"But *you* can't act."

"I am alluding to ladies, of course; men don't count. I am going down for the partridge-shooting more than for the other thing."

"But *I* can act, Gerard, as you know. Don't you remember my performance in 'A Scrap of Paper,' at the Tyndall's?"

"Perfectly well."

"You complimented me very highly on that occasion, and said I ought to have been on the stage like Georgie."

"I dare say I did. It's a good thing for you, though, that you kept off."

"But what I mean is, that I am quite competent to take a part in Lady Henry's theatricals."

"I have no doubt that you would be the best actress there."

"Then why can't you give her a hint on the subject?"

"Because I am not her ladyship's acting-manager, in the first place; and the members of my own household are the last people I should try to thrust under her notice, in the second."

"It's very tiresome of you, Gerard. I should have thought you might have done *so* much for me."

"I am sorry you think me disobliging; but I have really nothing to do with Lady Henry's arrangements. You forget, I am only a guest myself. Added to which, to tell you the plain truth, I don't think she would take very kindly to you, from the mere fact of your being my wife's cousin. She is so thoroughly disgusted with the way Georgie has behaved to me."

"Disgusted with Georgie!" cried Marian, shrilly; "well, that *is* good. Why, Lady Henry never could say enough against *you*, when she came to call here. I've heard her abuse you by the hour. If you said she was disgusted with yourself it would be more to the purpose."

Gerard Legh grew red with indignation.

"Please to remember to whom you are speaking, Marian. If Lady Henry ever expressed herself in the manner you mention, it must have been because things had been misrepresented to her; she had only heard one side, remember. When I told her the real state of the case, she soon altered her tone."

"She's as fickle as the wind," replied Marian, "and

veers round to a fresh quarter each minute. When your wife returns, and her ladyship wants a box, for which she is too stingy to pay, she will rush to her 'dearest Miss Harrington' to procure it."

"I am not likely to hear of it, if she does," said Captain Legh, coldly, as he turned on his heel and left her.

Marian Lacy had remarked for some time past that any reference to her cousin invariably produced the same effect. Captain Legh seemed to wish to avoid even the mention of his wife's name.

This conversation did not leave her in an amiable frame of mind toward Lady Henry Masham or the contemplated visit, and she never heard either of them alluded to without having some sarcastic observation to make on the subject.

Some few days afterward, whilst she was shopping at a West-end emporium, she came upon Miss Sylvia Marchmont, choosing ribbons and laces, and chatting excitedly with the young man behind the counter. As soon as she caught sight of Marian Lacy she bore down upon her.

"Oh! dear Miss Lacy, how are you? Do help me to choose these ribbons. They're for a fawn-colored tea-gown. Shall I trim it with a match or a contrast?"

Marian gave her opinion on the subject, to which Sylvia scarcely listened, as she rattled on:

"I suppose you've heard that I'm going to Lady Henry Masham's on Monday next; won't it be jolly? I am to play the juvenile lead in both their pieces. Not professionally, you know; I go as a visitor; but of course you have been told of it."

"No, indeed I have not; who should tell me?"

Sylvia opened her big, round, meaningless eyes.

"Why, Captain Legh! He sent me the invitation. Wasn't it sweet of him? You see, I wanted to get into Hatleigh House *awfully*. They have such tiptop swells there, and you never know what may turn up for a girl like me. But I didn't wish to go professionally; people treat you differently if they hear that; so, as I am 'resting' just now, Captain Legh gave me a bit of puff, you know, to Lady Henry, and she sent me an invitation—through him—by the next post. I expect he did it, you know," continued Sylvia, with a nudge of Marian's elbow, "for Lady Henry said something about him in her letter; and

he is so intimate at Hatleigh he can do anything he chooses in that way.”

Marian Lacy listened to this tirade for awhile in silence. She was turning hot and cold with envy and malice; and she dared not speak lest she should betray her feelings. But when Sylvia's chatter had ceased for awhile, she said:

“I have no doubt it was Captain Legh's recommendation that did it; but I don't think it is anything to be proud of to be asked to play for nothing for a stingy old woman, who won't give a single fee if she can help it. Lady Henry would spoil her theatricals sooner than part with her money.”

“Oh! come now,” cried Sylvia, “you know you'd give your eyes to be going in my stead. But it's awfully expensive, just at the end of the season. I've had to get almost everything new.”

Marian would listen to no more, but flounced out of the shop, whilst Sylvia nodded significantly to the young man behind the counter, and said:

“I fancy *that* riled her.”

Miss Lacy walked home in a state of the utmost perturbation.

Sylvia Marchmont had obtained that which she had been refused. It was shameful!—disgraceful! Captain Legh was making his partiality for the pretty, silly little actress a great deal too patent to the world. For poor Georgie's sake she ought to try and put a stop to it, and she would. Not another day should pass without her speaking to Gerard on the subject.

She fussed and fumed over the information she had received until she made herself quite ill, and having to wait until the evening to meet Gerard Legh rather increased her wrath than cooled it.

She contrived to sulk in silence until the cloth was removed from the dinner-table, but directly they found themselves alone she flew straight at him.

“Gerard, I wish to speak to you!”

“Very good! I am listening,” replied Captain Legh, as he lighted a cigar.

“I asked you the other day to get me an invitation to Lady Henry Masham's, and you refused!”

“I did!”

“On the score of not being intimate enough!”

"On the score, also, of not wishing to introduce you there. Go on."

"And now I find that you have done the very thing you refused to me for Sylvia Marchmont. You needn't deny it! I met her while shopping this morning, and she told me the whole story."

"I have no intention of denying it! Miss Marchmont only spoke the truth. Lady Henry has invited her to Hatleigh."

"And you asked her to do so!"

"I asked her to do so," he repeated, with the most provoking coolness.

"And you are not ashamed of yourself?"

"I am not aware what I have done to be ashamed of. Miss Marchmont goes there in the capacity of an actress to assist in getting up the plays. She is pretty and clever, and will do all that is required of her. Why should you fly out at me about it?"

"Because you know perfectly well," panted Marian, who was gray with rage, "that you are only saying all this in order to blind me to the truth. Do you suppose Lady Henry could not have found a dozen actresses to jump at her offer? But you single out Sylvia Marchmont and ask her to invite her. As if all the world could not see through so transparent a *ruse*!"

"I really don't know what you are driving at!" said Captain Legh, with a yawn.

"I will soon tell you. People are talking a great deal too much about you and Sylvia Marchmont. You flirted with her shamefully, even before your poor wife went to America."

"Look here!" said Captain Legh, calmly, though he was working up for a storm, "you can say what you like to me; I don't care for a woman's clatter any more than for the pattering of rain on my window. But I forbid you to bring my wife's name into the discussion. She has deserted me, and has nothing whatever to do with it!"

"That is absurd, and you know it!" retorted Marian. "Georgie has no more deserted you than I have. But if you kick a dog you must expect it to run away. At any rate, her absence can not loosen the ties between you, and you are still accountable to the law for your actions. And if you don't take care you'll find yourself in a scrape."

"Is that intended for a threat?" he demanded, as he rose from his chair.

"You may take it for what you like, but if you persist in parading your partiality for Miss Marchmont before the world, *I* will see that our family is not insulted more than it need be!"

"How *dare* you speak to me like this, and in my own house?" exclaimed Captain Legh, angrily. "Am I never to have a lady acquaintance without being subjected to abuse from your slanderous tongue? This is more than any man can stand!"

"Oh, yes, a nice acquaintance," sneered Miss Lacy. "Do you suppose anybody would be hoodwinked by such a lame excuse? If Lady Henry Masham is, she ought to be undeceived."

"By Jove!" cried Gerard Legh, "if you attempt to spread any of your scandal there I'll—"

"What will you do?" she asked, defiantly.

"I am wrong. I didn't think what I was saying," he replied, almost apologetically. "But it will be a bad day for you when you attempt to interfere in my affairs."

"I understand. I am nothing compared to this Sylvia Marchmont—a low-bred, second-rate actress, that Georgie only admitted to her house on sufferance. Your own cousin by marriage must go to the wall to make room for her."

"I have already told you that when I married my wife—bad luck to it!—I did not undertake to marry the entire family. One of such a stock is more than sufficient for me. And whilst you treat me to such scenes as these in the house, you must not be surprised to see me glad to get out of it. Good-night."

He tried to pass her and gain the door, but she barred his egress.

"Gerard, I would have been so glad to go with you instead of Sylvia!"

"I dare say you would; but I didn't see it. Be warned in time, Marian. You are going too far; and if I have any more of it I shall cut the business altogether."

He left her without another word, and Marian felt that, as far as Hatleigh was concerned, the game was lost. The conviction made her sore and aggressive. She snapped at the servants, and quarreled with her mother, and wandered

about the house moodily, until she found herself in Captain Legh's sanctum—a little back room, in which he kept his pipes and tobacco, and a writing-table covered with papers.

Marian had already gained access to much of his private correspondence because of his carelessness in leaving things about; and as she entered the room that evening, she perceived his bunch of keys hanging in the lock of the drawer.

Here was an opportunity to find out his secrets, and she was just in the mood to avail herself of it. She turned up the gas and secured the door, and sat herself down for a thorough inspection. After reading one or two trivial letters from various acquaintances, she came upon his diary—a little green-covered volume, in which Captain Legh usually noted his engagements. She opened the leaves, and grew green with jealousy as she perused their contents.

Then a sudden thought struck her. She would have her revenge. Georgie should receive the proofs of her husband's misconduct in his own handwriting. At first she determined to send her the book; but on second thoughts that seemed too dangerous. Gerard might miss it at once, and trace the robbery to her. She would extract the leaves that bore the most suspicious entries, and inclose them to her cousin anonymously.

It was no sooner thought of than done. With a sharp penknife she cut the pages close to the binding so that their loss was scarcely perceptible, wrote a few words on them in a feigned hand, inclosed them in an envelope addressed to Georgie, and dispatched it by that night's post to an old servant in the North who could not read, with directions that she should drop it in the letter-box.

When the deed was done beyond recall, Marian Lacy began to feel uncomfortable about it. She was afraid every moment lest Captain Legh would discover the loss and tax her with it; but nothing of the sort occurred. He was very cool to her for the remainder of his stay in London, and she felt that some change was impending.

She was not so astonished, therefore, as her mother, when, a few days after his departure for Hatleigh, he sent a letter to inform Mrs. Lacy that he had decided upon letting his house; had placed it, indeed, for that purpose in the agent's hands, and trusted she would not find it inconvenient to look for another home.

“Going to let the house!” ejaculated Mrs. Lacy.

"Why, how preposterous! Where is he going to live? And who will look after his comforts and his housekeeping, Marian, as you and I have done?"

"Oh, never mind, mamma," rejoined the young lady, fretfully. "If he chooses to be uncomfortable what does it signify to us? We shall be much happier in rooms by ourselves. I hate being at a man's beck and call!"

"Why, I thought you were so attached to Captain Legh, my dear!"

Marian grew red, as she answered:

"Well, naturally I have felt interested in him as Georgie's husband, but my interest can not go further than his own. And after all I am not quite sure if we did the wisest thing in coming here. People may think we are entirely on his side and have deserted hers. And by and by when she comes home with twice the name, perhaps, she took out with her, we shall look very small if she refuses to notice us. So I am glad, mamma, he has decided to let the house. It gives us an excuse to leave him, which might have been difficult to find. And we mustn't forget that Georgie Harrington is our real relation, not Captain Legh, and if it comes to a final separation between them, it will be our duty to stick to her."

CHAPTER XXVI.

PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

LADY HENRY MASHAM, besides being an amateur actress of social celebrity, was also a dramatic author in her way—that is to say, she wrote plays, although they never appeared upon the public stage. But she was rich enough to be able to counteract so trifling a drawback. She had a charming little theater erected in the rear of Hatleigh House, where her friends and she threw all their histrionic powers into presenting the melodramas and tragedies that issued from her fertile brain. Nor did they lack an audience, for not only was Hatleigh filled with guests from attic to basement on such occasions, but on the nights of performance the neighboring families were asked from far and near, until the auditorium was full to overflowing.

At such times Lady Henry was in her glory. She had generally a sprinkling of professionals amongst her guests,

and always a good stage-manager to put the whole thing into working order.

When Captain Legh arrived there in the present autumn he found that preparations were being made for the theatricals on a grander scale than usual.

Lady Henry's last literary effort—a melodrama entitled “Lost for Love”—was to be produced, and the superintendence of the scenery and effects was taking up all her time. A scene-painter was employed on the premises, daubing canvas from morning till night, and half a dozen wardrobe-women were stitching for dear life at the dresses. Every other person seemed to have a written part in his hand, which he studied furtively in odd moments, and no other subject was thought of or discussed than the success of the coming melodrama.

The company, though very pleasant, was decidedly mixed. Lady Henry made a little king of Mr. Thompson, the stage-manager, who sat on her right hand at the dinner-table, and followed her about the house like her shadow.

Sir Fulke and Lady Greville were of course amongst the guests. Sir Fulke pedantic, domineering, and self-confident, as a man is apt to become when a leader of society has rendered him notorious; and his wife, a quietly dressed, silent, depressed woman, who looked as if she knew she had been worsted in the battle of marriage, but had lost all interest in fighting for herself.

There were the famous Miss Fischers too—three lovely sisters, all equally beautiful, fast, and forward; and Arthur Helstone, commonly called “Soapy Helstone,” the dramatic critic. The Duke and Duchess of Longtoun rubbed elbows with Mrs. Bradley, the lessee of the Park Lane Theater, whose antecedents were as shady as her professional career had been bright; and Mademoiselle Artesine, of the Variétés, Paris, about whom no one knew anything at all, was taken in nightly to dinner by Mr. Martin D. C. Oppenstael, the great American banker, who was perfectly fascinated by the charms of the vivacious French woman.

Peers and peasants, artists and patrons, jostled each other in the heterogeneous crowd Lady Henry had gathered together at Hatleigh House; but though her party was decidedly Bohemian, it was thoroughly enjoyable, and every one beamed with good-temper and amusement.

Gerard Legh alone walked amongst this motley crew like

a Banquo at the feast. Lord Henry declared he was as good as ever in the shooting-field, and tramped over the turnips long after the rest of the men had given in. But every one in the house thought him painfully changed, physically as well as morally. Always pale, his complexion had now assumed a waxen hue, which was not healthy. His handsome eyes were sunk, and had a violet tinge beneath them, and his appetite had almost deserted him.

It was not until the business of the day was over, and the cigars were lighted, and the whisky toddy brewed in the smoking-room, that he appeared to wake up and show any signs of his former self. Then indeed his laugh was louder, his story more comical, and his wit keener than that of his companions. But the mood did not last long; and when it faded it left him with a deeper cloud upon his brow than before. His disposition, too, seemed to have altered. He was as courteous as ever—at times as well disposed for flirting—but he was far more silent and reserved than he had been wont to be, and he carefully avoided all mention of his wife. In so mixed a company, however—many of the members of which had known her for years—it was impossible but that he should be constantly annoyed by hearing her name—indeed the majority thought he would be offended if they did not mention her.

“Ah, Captain Legh!” exclaimed Mr. Thompson, the first time they encountered each other; “glad to meet you I’m sure! Charming assembly, isn’t it? What a pity Miss Harrington is not here! How is she? When did you hear from her last? I’ve read all about her American triumphs of course. She seems to have hit them up in California! But I knew she would. Splendid actress, sir! We have no one who can touch her in sympathetic parts. When do you expect her back again?”

“I am not sure. It is not decided,” replied Legh, carelessly.

“Ah, you must miss her I know. But she belongs to the world, sir, more than to you. If you marry a public favorite you must consent to give her up to the public.”

“So I have found, to my cost,” he answered.

“It’s stiff at first, isn’t it? I remember when Mrs. Thompson left me after a week’s honey-moon, to resume her provincial tour, I felt very queer about it. But it’s

made up for by the meeting. Only fancy how glad you'll be to get together again. I envy you the very idea."

Captain Legh was pulling his mustache, and wondering what he should say in answer, when his hostess hurried up to him.

"Captain Legh, that little friend of yours, Sylvia Marchmont, has just arrived. I think I once met her in your wife's house; but she is prettier off the stage than on. Now what am I to cast her for? What can she do?"

"Anything, I fancy, that you may require of her. She is a very clever little girl!"

"She played juvenile comedy at the Delphian, didn't she? I fancy I remember her as a fisher-maiden in 'The Siren.'"

"True; but she is good all round. I am sure you may trust her with melodrama. And she is pretty enough to ornament any stage."

"Ah, you naughty man, I expect you found that out before you asked me to invite her! But I won't have any flirting here remember. We are assembled for work, and not for play. But," continued her ladyship, lowering her voice, "is it *really* true that you and Miss Harrington are not going to live together again?"

Gerard Legh winced as he answered:

"Quite true. We came to the conclusion before we parted."

"It's very sad; but perhaps it's better so," said Lady Henry, soothingly. "When people don't get on well together I always say let them part. And Miss Harrington's temper is very high I am told. It's a shocking mistake in a woman to have a temper! I always keep mine in my pocket before Lord Henry. What plans have you made for the future?"

"Positively none, Lady Henry. I don't seem to have grown sufficiently accustomed to the new state of affairs yet. And Mrs. Lacy is keeping my house for me at present."

"Why do you retain that house? You would be much more comfortable in chambers."

"What could I do with it, Lady Henry? I believe we hold it on a twenty-one years' lease."

"Let it furnished; it will command a good rental and

leave you free. Don't let those Lacys have all the advantage of it. They are actually sponging upon you."

"I don't quite see how I could turn them out."

"Oh, you men—you men! How horribly helpless you are! Write and tell the old woman you have decided to let your house, and stay with us till she has cleared out of it."

"You are exceedingly kind, Lady Henry."

"No, I'm not. I *like* you," replied her ladyship, with that sweet, child-like frankness which women of society so frequently assume toward the other sex, "and I want to help you out of this dilemma if I can. I think you have been very badly used."

"Indeed you are mistaken," he answered, lightly, for he was too proud a man to bewail his misfortunes in public. "It was a mutual agreement between us, and suited one as well as it did the other."

"Well, then, I think Miss Harrington showed shocking bad taste, and didn't deserve to have so good-looking a husband," replied Lady Henry; "but we won't talk of it any more."

"I wish you wouldn't, Lady Henry. The subject is a very distasteful one to me."

"It is banished from this moment," cried her ladyship, theatrically; "but as you are unattached, Captain Legh, I shall expect you to be my own particular cavalier and *aid-de-camp* during this visit, and help me with all your power to entertain these people. I tremble when I think of what lies before me."

"I shall be only too proud to be of any assistance to you."

"Then take pity on me, Captain Legh, and play my lover in the opening piece."

"I! My dear Lady Henry! I have never stepped on the stage in my life."

"That is no reason why you should not do so now. I am sure you would make a most charming *jeune premier*."

"More likely I should spoil the whole concern. I have no more notion of acting than a table."

"It does not require any acting. It is the rôle of a young officer. You simply have to walk on the stage and be yourself. Come, Captain Legh, do let me persuade you to try—for *my* sake."

"I would do anything for your ladyship's sake that it is possible for me to do; but this I fear is impossible."

"And I am just as certain it is *not*. You will promise me to read the part, at all events, before you decide?"

"There is no harm in my promising *that*," returned Captain Legh.

"Then I shall consider it settled. For to tell you the truth," continued Lady Henry, in an under-tone, "poor dear Sir Fulke is getting a little too fat to play the very young man. Oh, I am delighted to have gained the promise of your assistance; and we will cast little Marchmont for the *soubrette's* part. It will be the very thing for her."

The interest evinced in him by his hostess, however, became, after awhile, rather a subject of annoyance to Gerard Legh.

She forced him, against his will, into the cast for her comedietta, and kept him rehearsing the love-scenes morning, noon and night.

Her conduct soon aroused the jealousy of Sylvia Marchmont, who had learned, during the past season, to look upon Gerard Legh as her *preux-chevalier*.

He found himself in a hornets' nest between them. He could not resent the kindness of his hostess, or show indifference to her wishes. At the same time, he found it difficult to soothe the indignation of Sylvia at seeing herself neglected for the lady of the house.

Sylvia didn't like either of the parts for which she had been cast; she was certain they had been chosen with the view to obscuring her ability. The piece was stupid, and her dresses were hideous; above all, she was indignant that Lady Henry should monopolize Captain Legh's attention, and make love to him on the stage as well as off; whilst she, Sylvia, was nowhere. In fine, she wished she had never come to the horrid place at all, and she had a great mind to go home again before the theatricals were over; and Captain Legh found it almost impossible to console her.

"My dear girl," he exclaimed, "you are making a great fuss about nothing at all! Lady Henry simply requires my services for this beastly comedietta; but I am bound to give them whenever she demands them."

"It is not true," sobbed Sylvia; "she monopolizes you wherever you are; and she kisses you at rehearsals! I've

seen her do it. As if *anybody ever* kissed at rehearsal! it's perfectly disgusting!"

"To tell you the truth, I feel very much inclined to say the same thing," replied Gerard, ruefully; "but I can't decline, can I, Sylvia? I owe so much, at least, to my hostess."

"It strikes me you owe a great deal too much to your hostess," grumbled Sylvia; "you never came near me once all last evening! There was that horrid old duke, with his yellow teeth, talking to me till I was bored to death, and when I looked to you for rescue you were leaning over Lady Henry's chair; I wonder you can have such bad taste. Her complexion's as rough as a nutmeg-grater—you can see it under the paint—and her hair's a wig—she has it from Fox, for he told me so."

"Poor little girl," said Captain Legh, laughing; "it's a terrible list of woes, isn't it? Well, if it will be any comfort to you to know, Sylvia, I don't admire the complexion nor the wig! I prefer these blooming cheeks, and this fluffy mass of brown hair, a thousand times over. But we mustn't let Lady Henry guess that, or we shall get turned out of Hatleigh House forever."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RIVALS.

As the day drew near for the performance of the theatricals Captain Legh wished more and more that he had never been so foolish as to let himself be drawn into taking a part in them.

He had no more idea of acting than his walking-stick, and he was not only conscious of it himself, but he saw that everybody else was conscious of it also.

Sir Fulke Greville, who was a finished actor, and was rather nettled at Lady Henry's attention being so much divided between himself and the *débutant*, took good care to let her know what he thought of Captain Legh's capabilities, and the sarcasms did not fail to reach his ears.

He implored his hostess to let him off in vain. Lady Henry had conceived a liking for him personally, and was determined that no one else should figure as her lover in the comedietta.

Gerard Legh looked handsome and gentlemanly on the stage. He could cross a room gracefully, and speak his lines, and that was all she required of him.

So he had to submit to be dressed in a costume of the time of Charles II., and to pose for the amusement of the audience.

He felt he had permitted himself to be caught in a net, from which it was unlikely he should be rescued without making himself ridiculous. But no one else came forward to relieve him of the task, and so he resolved to execute it with all the equanimity of which he was capable.

Sylvia Marchmont played the third character in the comedietta—that of the usual chamber-maid, who is conveniently at hand whenever she is wanted, and takes advantage of the temporary absence of her master and mistress to execute a song and dance in the drawing-room.

She had, therefore, to wait at the wings throughout the little piece, and had every opportunity to watch the proceedings of the lovers engaged upon the stage.

Her jealousy had been aroused by Lady Henry's behavior to Gerard Legh during the rehearsals. It was still more aggravated by what took place on the night of the performance.

Lady Henry Masham, who was really an *artiste*, not only felt at liberty, whilst under the disguise of her stage character, to give full play to her feelings, but actually threw an extra warmth into gesture and action, in order to encourage and stimulate her somewhat passive lover. Since Captain Legh could only take up the positions she had taught him, and speak his words, she felt obliged to cover his deficiencies by doing all the love-making for him.

But Sylvia, watching from the wings, would not make any allowance for the exigencies of the situation. When Captain Legh came off to permit Lady Henry to indulge in a soliloquy, she received him with a torrent of reproaches.

“It's perfectly disgraceful!” cried the little woman, trembling with rage. “Why do you allow her to pull you about in that manner? Everybody is remarking it—and you ought to be ashamed of yourself to encourage a married woman in such practices!”

“My dear child, pray don't talk so loud; the whole theater will hear you! How can I help what she does on

the stage? Do you wish me to run away, or to stop the performance whilst I preach her a sermon on the duties of the married state?"

"I'll pay her out for it, though. See if I don't!" exclaimed Sylvia, with sparkling eyes.

"You will do nothing so silly. It would only injure yourself instead of her. How can what you do possibly affect Lady Henry Masham?"

"I can *try*, at all events, and I'm not a woman if I don't! It's like her impudence kissing you in that way, and squeezing your hand. I'd like to scratch her eyes out, and pull her wig off her head. The horrid old thing!"

"Come, come!" said Legh, talking as he would to an angry child, "you mustn't be so spiteful! It's only for to-night, after all; and you're looking so pretty, you can afford to be generous to women less good-looking than yourself."

"I won't be generous to any one who tries to take you away from me. And I'll have my revenge! There's old Danvers, of the 'Epoch,' and Tomlinson, of the 'Call-boy,' in front, and I know she's asked them down here just to see her play! She's mad to get a professional engagement. Well, they shall see her play, that's all!"

"Sylvia, what do you mean?"

"I sha'n't tell you. It's my affair entirely. Besides, you don't deserve my confidence. You had better go back to your Lady Henry. She's quite ready to begin the kissing all over again."

"I would much rather have a kiss from you. Won't you give it me? I want all the consolation I can get for being compelled to make such a fool of myself for the amusement of the populace."

He wanted to coax her into a good temper again. He did not know what scheme she had in her head for annoying Lady Henry, but she looked spiteful enough for anything.

"Well, you *do* look a stick and no mistake!" cried Sylvia, laughing; "and you deserve it for dangling after that old woman as you have done! But if you want a kiss you shall have it," and she stood on tiptoe and held up her rosy mouth for his salute.

Just as he kissed her Lady Henry walked toward the wing and saw him. She had spoken his cue twice without

attracting his attention, and the cause of the neglect did not put her in a better temper.

She came off the stage at the close of the comedietta in a very evil frame of mind, and spoke very rudely to Sylvia Marchmont as she encountered her.

"Have you forgotten that you have to play in the melodrama?" she said, sharply. "I think it would be more becoming for you to be in your dressing-room than loitering about the wings."

"A thousand thanks to your ladyship," cried Sylvia, with an insolent courtesy; "but I have yet to learn that professionals need to be reminded of their duty by amateurs."

Gerard Legh saw that a storm was brewing, and walked quickly out of the theater to change his theatrical costume for evening dress. When he returned to the scene of action the curtain was just going up on the melodrama.

In this piece Lady Henry Masham and Sir Fulke Greville sustained the principal characters, and claimed all the sympathies of the audience.

This was only natural, as Lady Henry had written the drama to suit themselves. But there was a minor character which had been intrusted to Sylvia, upon whom most of their play depended.

Sylvia had grumbled on first reading her part, and declared it was unworthy of her ability.

But she was wrong. Although it was not a sympathetic one, it was so absolutely necessary to the piece that the story could not have been told without it. And from the moment the girl stepped upon the stage her whole energies were bent upon destroying every situation the leading actors had arranged for themselves.

One after another they were spoiled by means of her willful inattention, unpunctuality, or wrong cues, until Lady Henry grew furious, and Sir Fulke was perfectly confused and hardly knew what he was about.

As soon as the drop-scene descended on the first act Lady Henry, who was pale with anger, demanded an explanation from Miss Marchmont of the extraordinary manner in which she was playing her part. But if she thought to get any satisfaction from her rival she was mistaken.

Sylvia looked as innocent as if she had been doing her very best. She expressed herself as much astonished as she

was annoyed by her ladyship's displeasure, and maintained that her reading of the part was perfectly correct. There was nothing to be done but to endure it.

The curtain was being rung up for the second act, and the piece could not proceed without Sylvia, who continued in her former course of spoiling every situation in which she took part; and as she came off Captain Legh tried to remonstrate with her.

"Are you mad, Sylvia?" he exclaimed. "You will ruin your reputation by this carelessness!"

"Ruin my fiddlesticks!" cried the girl, contemptuously. "Do you suppose any manager would take the word of an amateur? If you said I should ruin the chances of her play it would be more to the purpose, and that is what I mean to do."

"But why should you be so malicious?"

"Didn't I tell you I would have my revenge? Well, I am having it. Hulloo, there's my cue! No hurry, your ladyship," she said, affecting to address the heroine on the stage. "You can say it once or twice more—it's all practice. I've got to catch her in this scene, and I shall let her fall," she continued to Captain Legh, as she left him to resume her business.

He waited on the same spot, anxious to see what would happen. At one point Lady Henry had to faint, and it was Sylvia's business to catch and support her on one knee as she did so. He could not believe that the girl really intended to do as she had threatened. But when the time came she did. She managed to be just a second too late, and Lady Henry threw herself back on the floor instead of into the arms she expected to receive her, and hurt her head so much that she was hardly able to go through the remainder of the piece. Sir Fulke's speeches and actions lost their significance from her defalcation, and the melodrama was a *fiasco*.

Of course there was applause when the curtain fell, but people who don't pay for their tickets must applaud. Danvers and Tomlinson got up yawning, and said there might be stuff in the piece, but it had been so "doosidly" badly played it was impossible to criticise it; and no one seemed to have a much more favorable opinion.

Lady Henry was so indignant that she refused to see or speak to Sylvia Marchmont again that evening; and the

little actress went chuckling to bed, whilst Captain Legh had to remain behind and bear all the brunt of his hostess's lamentations over the failure of her melodrama, and anger against the girl who had done her utmost to ruin it.

Gerard Legh, having introduced Sylvia to Hatleigh House, and stood sponsor for her dramatic talent, came in for a large share of blame, and had to make a thousand apologies for his protégée and himself.

"Of course, after Miss Marchmont's excessive rudeness to myself, and her malicious endeavors to ruin my piece, you can hardly expect me to extend my invitation to her," said Lady Henry.

And Gerard answered, "Of course not," and wondered which side he would be called upon to take for the future.

As soon as the late breakfast, at which Lady Henry did not appear, was over, the following morning, Sylvia skipped up to him with a note in her hand.

"What's the meaning of this?" she said.

He took the note and read:

"LADY HENRY MASHAM presents her compliments to Miss Marchmont, and begs to say that after what occurred last night it is impossible she can meet Miss Marchmont again. Lady Henry does not wish to put Miss Marchmont to any inconvenience, but so long as she remains in Hatleigh House, Lady Henry will keep to her own room."

"What does it mean?" repeated Sylvia, pertly, peering up into Gerard's face.

"It means," he answered, gravely, "that you must go. You can not keep the lady of the house a prisoner in her own room. You must leave Hatleigh this morning."

"All right. I've done all I wanted to do, and I'm sure I don't want to stay. But you must come with me."

"Indeed I shall do no such thing. How *could* I go with you? What would people say to such an arrangement? Besides, I have not yet finished my visit here."

"But you *must* come," interposed the girl, hotly. "If you don't come with me, you must leave the house to-day! You brought me here, and it is shameful that I should be turned out in this way, as if I was a thief, or something disgraceful!"

"You have brought it on yourself, my dear. You are

not in a position to quarrel with women like Lady Henry Masham. You are bound to go to the wall."

"I don't want to remain here, I tell you! I think she's odious; and I wouldn't sit down to table again with her! But you must come with me. I won't leave you here to be kissed and made love to by her; and if you remain I shall give her a bit of my mind!"

"Sylvia, you shall do no such thing. You have made me sufficiently ridiculous already over this business, and I will have no more of it! If you don't quit Hatleigh before luncheon-time I shall! But it will not be with you. Understand that plainly."

"Now you are going to quarrel with me on her account," said Sylvia, jealously.

"Indeed I am not. Women are not worth quarreling with or about."

"You didn't think so a year ago. You quarreled enough with your wife; everybody knows that."

"I have already told you I will not hear my wife alluded to by you. Whatever passed between us is no concern of yours."

"My tongue is my own, and I shall say what I choose!" cried Sylvia, pertly. "You led poor Miss Harrington a nice cat-and-dog life, and she was obliged to put up with it because she was your wife. But you won't find other women quite so easy. You'll have to keep your temper to yourself with me, and so I tell you!"

"I have nothing more to say on the subject," replied Captain Legh.

"Very good. I shall start by the twelve train to London, and if you keep to your word you've seen the last of me; so take your choice!"

"I mean to keep my word, Sylvia. I do not leave Hatleigh to-day unless you remain here."

"Good-bye, then; and you needn't trouble yourself to call on me when you return to town, for I shall be out!"

"I shall remember your words, and I shall not call," he answered, and Sylvia flounced out of the room, quite ready to cry at the turn affairs had taken; whilst Captain Legh turned on his heel, and only thought what a fool a man was ever to allow himself to be made the bone of contention between two silly women.

Miss Marchmont having taken flight, Lady Henry

Masham condescended to appear at the luncheon-table; and after the congratulations from her friends, and assurances that nothing could have gone better than the melodrama, and every one saw the sole hitch was due to Miss Marchmont's carelessness, equanimity was restored at Hatleigh House.

But all this fuss and worry seemed to have an effect upon Gerard Legh's health. He had not been well when he arrived at Hatleigh, and as soon as the theatricals were over he visibly declined. His nights were disturbed, his appetite failed, and he had no longer strength to tramp over the plowed fields after the partridges, as he had been wont to do.

At last, one evening, as he was sitting at dinner and trying to listen to the flattery Lady Henry was pouring into his ear, a sudden faintness came over him; the lighted candelabra seemed to spin round and round; the chatter of the guests became indistinct; and he fell off his chair in a swoon.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LAST LINK.

As soon as Captain Legh recovered consciousness he rose to go to his own room. His sense of courtesy was shocked at having upset the order of the dinner-table, and all his anxiety was to see it restored. A dozen men, amongst whom was Lord Henry Masham, volunteered to accompany him upstairs, but he begged to be left alone. He was annoyed at having made such a display in public. He felt quite well again now, and the kindest thing they could do was to leave him quiet for an hour or two.

So, followed by the condolences of the whole party, and with the attendance only of a footman, he sought his chamber. But as soon as he arrived there he felt his powers of exertion were spent. He sat down on the side of the bed giddy and confused, and tried to think. What was going to happen to him? He had never fainted in his life before. What did it portend? He had felt ill and languid for some days past, but nothing to lead him to expect such a breakdown as this. He was hot and cold by turns, and trembling in every limb, and the furniture of the room kept spin-

ning round and shifting places, and making him feel as if he were going mad. He staggered to his feet, and groping his way to the brandy-flask that stood on his mantel-piece, drained it at a draught. The stimulant steadied his nerves for a moment, and in that moment he decided what to do. He was going to be ill—there was no doubt of that. It might be something infectious. He must leave the house at once.

He rang the bell for a servant, and desired him to get a hired carriage; and then with difficulty putting a few things into a traveling-bag, he sat down, trembling, to wait his return. When the vehicle was ready, he slipped downstairs, gave the servant half a sovereign to tell his master quietly that, as he was sure he was going to be ill, he had thought it wiser to leave the house without delay, and getting into the carriage, ordered the driver to take him to the nearest inn, which was a little hostelry called the Red Lion, in the village of Hatleigh.

As soon as Gerard Legh, under the influence of excitement, had accomplished this feat, his strength gave way. He had barely time to stumble upstairs to the only bedroom the inn could afford him, when he fell into a kind of stupor, and the landlord ran in a fright to convey the news to Hatleigh House.

Lord Henry Masham, always kind-hearted and hospitable, was shocked to think that any guest should have left his roof under such circumstances. He took a doctor to the inn at once, and insisted upon remaining all night upon the spot.

Captain Legh was by that time unable to recognize him or anybody. He slumbered heavily and unnaturally, and the doctor did not like his appearance.

When morning dawned he liked it less, and conjured Lord Henry to return at once to his own house. Captain Legh's condition showed every symptom of typhoid fever, and as his lordship could do him no good, it was quite unnecessary he should run the risk of infection. Lord Henry saw the sense of the argument and withdrew, though not before he had telegraphed to London for another doctor and a nurse; and so Gerard Legh lay at the Red Lion tended by strangers, whilst Georgie Harrington was in California unaware of his danger.

The anxiety displayed by the inmates of Hatleigh House

during the progress of his disease was very great; but it only showed itself in discussing his chances of life and death, and sending him flowers and fruit. No one was brave enough to go and see him. The visitors (amongst whom was the Mrs. Raynor who had written the news to California to her brother, Lord Frederic Carr) mostly dispersed to their own homes, so afraid were they of the infection; and Lady Henry lamented sorely that it was a duty she owed to herself and her household not to go near the poor dear invalid. She provided him with everything necessary from her own establishment; she even wept freely during the two or three days when he seemed in danger of dying, and said she should never forget the sweet unselfishness he had shown for *her* sake, in leaving the house when he felt his illness coming on. But her friendship did not extend to the risk of a personal interview, or even to entering the place where he lay. However, Captain Legh's excellent constitution and youth were in his favor, and, after a sharp tussle with the enemy, he came off victorious.

In a month's time, though still weak and looking the shadow of his former self, he was pronounced convalescent, and ready to receive visitors. Then the owners of Hatleigh House shook off their fear, and spent several hours daily by the bedside of the invalid. Lady Henry's interest, indeed, blossomed into quite a sisterly affection under the peculiarity of the circumstances—until to kiss the poor patient morning and evening, and to sit half the day with her hand in his, became a matter of course. She was obliged to be all the kinder to him, she would say, smiling, because he had none of his own people to take her place. For Lord and Lady Kinlock happened to be traveling in Italy on account of the latter's bronchitis; and the Ladies Legh refused to leave Summerhayes without the permission of their parents, which arrived when all necessity for their services was over.

It was pleasant for Gerard Legh to be able to sit up again, though the room he occupied was anything but luxurious, and know that life was not yet over for him. His brain was still weak and confused; but he felt as if a pressure had been lifted from it by his illness that might otherwise have broken it down.

He hardly remembered Georgie at first, nor the trouble of the past year. He was like a little child gradually waking to a sense of the pleasure of existence; and his chief

interest seemed to lie in the taste of his food, the scent of the flowers by his bedside, and the soothing influence of Lady Henry's affection. But the day came when he grew stronger, and thought returned to worry him, and yet he had not acquired sufficient strength to conceal his trouble as before. His weary gaze, and deep sighs, and indifference to the things he at first took pleasure in, soon attracted Lady Henry's attention, and she pressed him to tell her the reason of it.

"It is nothing in particular," he replied; "it is my whole life that has been a mistake, Lady Henry. I only wonder why I should have recovered from this illness. It would have been so much easier for me to have died and done with it all."

"Now, my dear friend, you are growing morbid and sentimental, and I can't allow that. Why should your future life not be as happy as that of other people? You have only to look at it philosophically, and it will be so."

"I am afraid philosophy would have a hard task to make my crooked places straight, Lady Henry."

"Well, I shall attempt the cure, whether it succeeds or not. And in the first place you must cease to address me as Lady Henry; it is too formal between friends. Call me 'Kate,' and I will call you 'Gerard;' then we shall stand upon equal ground."

"You are too kind," murmured the invalid, with a feeble pressure of her hand; "I have done nothing to deserve it!"

"Indeed you have! I felt there was a tie of sympathy between us the first day we met, which has only increased with our further acquaintance. And I think I can guess what is troubling you, Gerard. It is the thought of that false woman who has treated you so badly. You must forget her indeed. She is not worthy of you!"

Captain Legh turned his face upon his pillow. He was not strong enough yet to bear the sound of his wife's name. But he made a feeble remonstrance against Lady Henry's accusation.

"It is not so indeed, Kate," he murmured. "In your kindness of heart you are all on my side. But our tempers clashed. That was at the root of it. There was nothing else to—to—separate us."

"Ah, so you may think, my poor boy; but husbands are

invariably the last persons to be told of these things. And you should have heard Miss Harrington's own opinion on the matter; it was very different from yours."

The sick man sighed, but did not speak.

"Nothing could be too bad for *her* to say of *you*!" continued Lady Henry, warmly. "I am sure it has made my blood positively run cold to hear her. But that is always the way with one's inferiors. If they fancy themselves wronged they can only take refuge in abuse!"

"But Georgie has as good blood in her veins as I have," said Gerard Legh, flushing.

"My dear Gerard, she *says* so; but all officers are not of good birth, as we well know. And at any rate you should have looked much higher in marriage. Her profession alone unfitted her for the position of your wife. Now I wish you would try and look at it in this light. It was an unfortunate alliance; but it is ended, and the only thing you have to do is to forget her."

"But I *can't* forget her!" exclaimed the invalid, betrayed by his weakness into a confession of which he would never have been guilty in health. "The remembrance of her haunts me night and day. I shall never replace her, Lady Henry. She has spoiled me for any other woman. There is not one who combines her beauty, and talent, and charm—when she chooses to be charming. And I have a beastly temper, you know—there is no doubt of that—and it was the cause of most of the differences that took place between us."

Lady Henry did not like the mood into which Captain Legh had fallen. He was all very well when he posed as her own particular friend; but as the repentant lover of somebody else she had no sympathy with him, so she replied, rather coldly:

"I suppose I must excuse this outbreak on account of your illness, Captain Legh; otherwise it would be excusable! Such a want of self-respect and proper pride I should have believed impossible in you! To lament over and cherish the memory of a woman who first deserts you, and then makes herself notorious by her conduct on the other side of the water!"

"Who *dares* say that?" cried Gerard Legh, springing up in bed, with his pale face suddenly flushed with crimson.

"Now, my dear Gerard, don't excite yourself. It is not

one person who says it; *everybody* knows it for a fact! You should have heard Mr. Martin D. C. Oppenstael speak of Miss Harrington before he knew that she was your wife. It quite made me blush to think I had ever shaken hands with her."

"What did he say?" demanded Gerard, in a low voice.

"Why, that she was making herself talked of everywhere with a man of the name of Boch—one of your great New York millionaires, who followed her about from place to place, and had bowers of roses erected for her to pass under wherever she stopped. Besides, there were other names mentioned in connection with hers, till I really asked him to stop. I could not bear such things spoken of in my house, for poorly as I think of most of the members of her profession, I hoped that Miss Harrington had a little more sense of the honor of an alliance with yourself than to drag your name in the dirt as she has done!"

Gerard Legh turned round on his pillow and groaned.

Boch! Yes, that was the same name that appeared in Louise Fletcher's letter to Marian Lacy, when she said that Georgie was about to get a divorce from himself, and marry the millionaire. It was hardly likely that two people should be mistaken.

"Did Mr. Oppenstael mention anything about my wife getting a divorce from me?" he stammered, after awhile.

"Oh, dear, no! Miss Harrington, having shaken herself free of one marriage, will not be so eager to jump into another. She will go on her wild career unchecked, and I only hope she may never return to England. She will not do it, unless she should find it will pay her better than remaining out there. I fancy she is a lady who knows on which side her bread is buttered! "And now this is the reason, my dear friend," continued Lady Henry, turning to Gerard Legh, who lay, alternately flushing and paling with anger, upon his pillow, "that I want you to do your best to try and forget that this woman ever existed. She has marred the best part of your life; don't let her spoil all the rest!"

"Thank you—thank you!" replied Captain Legh, wringing her hand. "She shall not—you may depend upon that!"

"And remember that you have always two stanch friends in Lord Henry and myself, who will do all in our

power to assist you. By the way, I have some good news for you, Gerard. I have taken the transaction of your business into my own hands during your illness, and I have let your house. My friends, the Stantons, wanted it for a year, and entered upon possession last week. So that is off your hands, and you can begin your new career in chambers!"

"I can never thank you sufficiently for all your kindness to me," said Gerard Legh, though she had planted a poisoned barb in his heart that was already diffusing its deadly influence over his whole system.

As soon as ever the doctor would permit his removal Lord and Lady Henry Masham insisted upon his returning to Hatleigh, where he received every attention necessary to insure his recovery.

By the end of November he was able to leave the house, and one of his first visits was paid to his club, where he found a number of letters awaiting him.

Turning them over indifferently, his cheek flushed as he came across one in the handwriting of his wife.

It was now fifteen months since she had left him, and during all that time he had never received a line from her until now.

Burning with the remembrance of the stories he had heard against her, his first impulse was to tear the letter in half and throw it into the fire.

But on second thoughts he decided to read it, whatever pain it gave him. It might confirm what he had been already told, and snap the last link between them.

But when he opened and perused the note Georgie had written him from San Francisco his amazement knew no bounds.

She was actually coming home—might be in England at that very moment—and had the audacity to propose to live with him again. What could be the reason for her sudden determination? Had Mr. Boch proved a rotten reed, and did she think to fall back on her husband's name and protection for support? But she would find she had reckoned without her host. She had chosen her path in life, and left him to choose his, and she must abide by the consequences!

And so he sat down, in hot haste and wrath, and penned the letter which greeted Georgie Harrington on her arrival at Queenstown.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SORRY WELCOME.

WHEN Georgie read that letter the contents took her so completely by surprise that she stood in the center of her cabin like a dazed creature, not knowing what to think or to do. On the impulse of the moment, believing her husband to be dangerously ill, she had thrown up her brilliant engagement and crossed the water, only to receive this buffet in the face as soon as she reached England.

If she had not expected Gerard to throw himself at once into her arms, she had at least thought that he would meet her advances like a gentleman, and be ready to listen to what she said, if he did not agree to it.

But he actually refused to receive her; and he coupled his refusal with an insinuation that made her cheeks burn. She had not had time to realize the position, however, before Sissy flew into the cabin with the news that Mr. Brabazon Chauncey had come on board, and was waiting in the saloon to see her.

Georgie thrust the letter in her pocket and hastened to greet her old friend; and as he took her two hands in his, and pressed them warmly, she felt there was one person at least who had a genuine welcome for her on her return.

But notwithstanding his pleasure at their reunion, Mr. Brabazon Chauncey was very much concerned that Georgie should have left America so soon.

"My dear girl!" he exclaimed, as soon as they had ensconced themselves on one of the saloon sofas, and were ready for a comfortable chat, "the few lines you sent me, announcing your return, took my breath away! What on earth was the reason of your breaking off your engagement in that sudden manner, and when you had achieved such an enormous success? Did you have any quarrel with Maxim?"

"Dear me, no! On the contrary, we parted the best of friends."

"I won't ask if the climate disagreed with you, Georgie, for I never saw you looking better. Why, then, have you taken this sudden freak in your head? It is a most serious

thing, interrupting your transatlantic career in this way. You may never regain lost ground."

"I think it is very likely I never may," replied Georgie, bitterly.

An hour ago she would have told Mr. Chauncey frankly of the reason which induced her return. Now, with that cruel letter in her pocket, she was ashamed to speak of the false hopes she had entertained. But her friend guessed the thoughts that were brooding in her brain.

"I hope," he said, after a pause, "that you have not relinquished your prospects on account of some fancied duty toward your husband, my dear, for I can assure you he is not worthy of it. I have seen and heard a good deal of Captain Legh since your departure, and I should be very sorry to see you living together again."

"There is no chance of that," she said, sadly, "for—for he refuses to see or speak to me."

"*He refuses!*" reiterated Brabazon Chauncey. "Impossible! On what ground?"

"None in particular. Oh! Mr. Chauncey, I may as well tell you all. I received the news whilst in San Francisco of my husband's illness, and I could not rest until I came home to him. I canceled my engagement, therefore, with Maxim, and traveled as fast as I could; I thought Gerard might die before we were reconciled! I wrote him a note, before I started, to tell him all this, and the answer has just been put into my hand. Captain Legh *declines* my offer," she continued, hysterically, "to live with him, or assist him. He tells me to—to return to my friends in New York, as there is no welcome for me here."

"It's just what you might have expected from such a worthless fellow as he is!" exclaimed Mr. Chauncey, indignantly. "Georgie, I am sincerely sorry you should have made such a sacrifice for his sake; with your former experience you should have known better. But don't fret over it now; there is plenty of welcome for you in England, my child, if not from him. Half a dozen theaters are ready to open their doors to you; and if, after a few months spent amongst us, you decide to return to America, I will soon make another engagement for you. So cheer up, and try to remember that the world does not consist of one man only."

"You have always encouragement and kind promises for

me, Mr. Chauncey. But, disappointed as I am by this letter, it makes me still more glad that I have come. There is some mystery in it that I can not fathom. I am afraid some one has been tampering with my good name behind my back, and that is a thing which it is necessary I should know in order to refute. Have any ill-natured stories reached your ears, Mr. Chauncey?"

"Since you put the question to me, Georgie, I must say they have. Nothing in particular, you know, my dear, but nasty, unkind little hints, and stories without top or tail, and fathered by no one. Of course I have denied them on my own responsibility, but unless you can trace the author of a scandal it is difficult to quell it."

"What did they say?" asked Georgie, with an anxious face. During all her professional career she had kept her place in society from her pure and spotless reputation, and to be the object of slander was something very new and painful to her. "What did they say?" she repeated. "What *could* they say, Mr. Chauncey? I have never done anything during my absence that I need blush to recall."

"I have no doubt of it, my dear girl. And I have known you too long to believe anything I might hear in your disfavor. But you have enemies; there is no doubt of that. Women, most likely, who are jealous of your good looks and reputation, and would be delighted to see you fall from your high estate. Never confide in women, my dear. They are the natural enemies of their own sex."

"But did they mention no names? Have they made no direct accusation against me?" she demanded.

"None that I know of. I *did* hear once that you were married again—to the president, I believe—but that was too insignificant a rumor to deserve notice."

"How supremely ridiculous!" said Georgie, affecting to laugh. "And do you think any of these nonsensical stories can have reached Captain Legh?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," replied Chauncey, brusquely; "but I'm certain of one thing, Georgie; that those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones; and that man has no right to blame you for anything you may have done during your separation."

"I am afraid you have not a very high opinion of him," she said, biting her lip.

"You *know* I haven't. I have thought his treatment of

you all through your married life shameful, and he has capped it by his behavior in your absence. Don't flatter yourself he has been fretting for your loss, my dear. He has enjoyed himself excellently well, never fear."

"Then he is really recovered of his illness?"

"I met him in the Strand yesterday, swaggering along just the same as usual. There didn't seem much the matter with him then. And his letter must show you he is quite strong enough to be spiteful."

"If he has heard stories against me," cried Georgie, excitedly, "I will not rest until I have disabused his mind upon the matter. I do not wish to live with him again, since he has ceased to love me; but I will not let my character rest under a false imputation. I will clear myself in his eyes, and then I will leave him forever, and go back to America."

"Do anything you like, so long as you *leave* him," said Brabazon Chauncey, gayly. "But I'll never forgive you, my dear, if you are so foolish as to put your head into the noose again."

He ran after Sissy as he spoke, and left her to digest what he had said at her leisure. How strange it was that they should *all* be against her! That even her best friends seemed to try all in their power to prevent her doing her duty. Not that she was in the right mood to do it at that particular moment. Captain Legh's letter had made her heart sore and angry, and the rumors she had heard since had not tended to soften it. If ever in her life she had felt a longing for revenge it was now. Revenge against her slanderers, and revenge against her husband—the sweet revenge of forcing him to acknowledge himself in the wrong. His refusal to give his address had upset all her plans. She no longer knew what to do, nor where to go, on her arrival in London; and she was compelled to confess the cause of her indecision to her traveling-companion, Mrs. Fletcher.

Louise looked rather blank when she first heard of the crisis Georgie's matrimonial affairs had attained; but after her first surprise was over she took refuge in abusing the absent partner.

"What did I tell you in New York, Georgie, when I heard you were coming home on this wild-goose chase—that it was of no use running after a man who didn't want you,

and that if you *did* come together again you'd bitterly repent it? Now, who was right and who was wrong?"

"Oh, of course I was all wrong; I see that plainly enough," replied Georgie, fretfully. "But it has nothing to do with the hotel we are to go to. Shall it be Morley's in Trafalgar Square? I have always been so comfortable there before."

"By all means let us go to Morley's. I sha'n't stay with you there long, you know, darling, because I can't afford it; but it will do nicely till I have found rooms. I wonder if your cousin, Marian Lacy, could tell me of some?"

"I dare say she can. I wonder I have not heard from Marian or Aunt Laura! I wrote to them to my house, where Lord Frederic Carr told me they were staying; but as Captain Legh has let it, of course they can't be there. I suppose the letter will be forwarded to their new address. I am so anxious to see Marian, and find out if she can give me any clue to this mystery."

So anxious was she, that Mr. Brabazon Chauncey had not deposited her and her belongings at Morley's Hotel for more than an hour before she had ordered a carriage and driven to her house in the little street leading out of Park Lane. How familiar and yet unfamiliar it looked! There were her own guipure lace curtains, with their pale blue linings, in the drawing-room windows; but she never would have left the tiled boxes in the balcony, which once bloomed with summer flowers, full of withered stalks and blackened leaves. And from the dining-room casement, too, peered forth two baby faces, eager with curiosity, to see the "pretty lady in the carriage."

Georgie kept her eyes fixed pertinaciously upon the door; it hurt her to see the strangeness of the house, and to think how different it would be were she coming home to take up her rightful place in it again, with her husband by her side. But it was her own fault, she supposed, that it was not so.

The servant who answered her summons, and who was a very inferior-looking creature to her own neat handmaids, had to scream inquiries both upstairs and down-stairs before she could elicit the information that Mrs. Stanton believed that Mrs. Lacy had moved somewhere near Edgware Road, but that Captain Legh had the address.

Could Mrs. Stanton oblige her with Captain Legh's ad-

dress, Georgie next asked, hoping that the answer might give her a clew to his private residence; but she only received the name of his club in return.

She was about to drive to Mrs. Lacy's old rooms, with a view to questioning the landlord about his late lodgers, when she caught sight of Marian in Oxford Street. In a moment the check-string was pulled, and Georgie had jumped out upon the pavement and arrested the progress of her cousin.

"Marian!" she cried; "it is I, Georgie! Oh, I am so glad to see you! I have been driving about to try and get your address. Why didn't you write to me at Liverpool? How is Aunt Laura? Get into the carriage with me, there's a dear girl, and we will drive to your rooms together."

"My goodness, *Georgie!* How you startled me! I had no idea you were in England! I have received no letter from you! When did you arrive? What have you come for? Well, this *is* a pleasure! Mamma will be delighted; she is always lamenting your absence! We are living in George Street now." And giving the directions to the coachman, she followed her cousin into the vehicle.

"My dear girl, how well you are looking," she began again, as soon as they set off. "America certainly seems to have agreed with you. And now do tell me what brought you home."

"What brought me home!" repeated Georgie, vaguely. "Oh, a dozen things. First, to see England again, and hear how you were all going on."

"And when did you arrive at Liverpool?"

"Yesterday afternoon. We slept at the Grand, and Mr. Chauncey brought us on to Morley's this morning. Louise Fletcher has returned with me, and of course I have Sissy and Rachel."

"Oh, Mr. Chauncey met you at Liverpool, then?" said Marian, ignoring the remainder of Georgie's communication.

"He was good enough to go all the way to Queenstown; and a great comfort he was. I don't know what we should have done without him, considering he was the only person who had the politeness to come to our assistance."

"Didn't Gerard go?" demanded Marian, with affected astonishment.

"My dear Marian, I don't even know where Gerard is.

He knew the date of my arrival well enough, but he only sent me an unkind letter, which I have brought to show to your mother—in fact, that is the reason of my seeking you out so soon. I can not rest until I have heard all there is to tell about it!”

“Well, here are our rooms, dear, and I know mamma is at home; so come in and have a cup of tea, and we will give you all the information in our power.” And in another minute Georgie was standing in the presence of Mrs. Lacy.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN CHAMBERS.

MARIAN LACY had run quickly up the stairs before her cousin, and calling out effusively to her mother:

“Only fancy, mamma! Here is our dear Georgie home again!” had found time to add, in a whisper, “*Not a word about the letter!*” before the latter appeared upon the scene.

The truth being that Miss Lacy *had* received the intimation of Georgie’s return, but found it more convenient, for several reasons, to ignore the fact. She did not wish to incur the expense of going to Liverpool to meet her, nor did she want to see her at all until she had found out if Captain Legh had informed his wife that she and her mother had kept house for him.

She had seen and heard nothing of Gerard since they had quarreled on his departure for Hatleigh until that very morning, when she had obtained the address of his chambers from a mutual friend, and been to call on him.

The interview was brief and unpleasant. Captain Legh had shown very plainly that her presence was unwelcome to him. He had refused point-blank to give her any information about his wife’s movements or his own, and had sent her home burning with a desire for revenge. She was therefore in a fit condition to play into Georgie Harrington’s hands, and afford her every assistance in her power, so long as it was to be given with a view to annoy and circumvent Captain Legh.

“Only fancy, mamma!” she continued, as Mrs. Lacy

embraced her niece, and tried to express astonishment (though not so successfully as Marian) at her return, "Gerard never went to meet her at Liverpool, although he knew the date of her arrival, and the poor dear girl doesn't even know where he lives. Isn't it perfectly shameful? It makes one marvel what the world is coming to."

"It is shameful!" acquiesced Mrs. Lacy, kissing Georgie again; "but it is no more than I expected of him, and only on a piece with the rest of his conduct. I hope you have not come home with any idea of seeking a reconciliation with him," she continued, addressing her niece; "for I can assure you he is not worthy of your regard. He has been spreading the most scandalous reports about you all over London, and you will lower yourself very much if you take any notice of him."

"But *why*," demanded Georgie as they sat down together, "if this is the case, did you and Marian go to live with him, Aunt Laura? I confess, when I heard it, it surprised me. It seemed so much as if I was in the wrong, and my family took sides against me."

"My dear child, who could have so cruelly misrepresented the case to you?" cried Mrs. Lacy, with uplifted hands. "Oh, Marian, isn't it *wicked*? The fact is, dear Georgie, Captain Legh was going on so strangely that, when he came and *begged* me to keep house for him for a little while, I thought it better to comply for *your* sake. I thought my presence there would prevent scandal; and, until matters were finally settled between you, it was wiser to keep up appearances before the world. However, it was of no avail. Captain Legh did not like the restrictions of a respectable household, and Marian and I resolved to look out for another home. It was no pleasure for *me*, I can assure you, my dear girl—in fact I lost money by the arrangement; and as for poor Marian, she was worn out with his fussy ways and late hours. And, as things have turned out, I am very sorry we ever went there at all."

"It has not done much good, it appears to me, to anybody," replied Georgie, with a wintery smile. "I came home on account of my husband's illness. I suppose you have heard how ill he has been?"

"We never should have done so except for meeting Miss Sylvia Marchmont," said Marian, with a toss of her head.

Georgie winced as she heard the name; but she answered, calmly:

"I understood from Mr. Chauncey that Gerard was taken ill at Hatleigh House."

"So he was, my dear; but Miss Marchmont was there too, invited by Lady Henry through Captain Legh. I met the little wretch in a sealskin cloak down to her feet the other day, and she informed me that 'Gerard' was quite well again now, and going about as usual. They say he nearly died of the fever. Some people might think it a pity that he didn't die altogether!"

"Don't say that, Marian; he is not fit to die. Aunt Laura, I suppose you will think me very weak, but I threw up my American engagement, and came home expressly to see Gerard and make it up with him. I half hoped he would be as anxious for a reconciliation as I am, and come to meet me at Liverpool; but instead of that, I was met at Queenstown by this letter," and she laid it in Mrs. Lacy's hand.

"Why, it's a positive insult!" cried Marian, as she read it over her mother's shoulder: "and what does he mean by telling you to go back to your 'friend' in New York? Is that intended for an attack on your character?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it?" replied Georgie, proudly; "but if Captain Legh thinks I shall stand it quietly he is very much mistaken. I have stood a good deal, as you both know, but this is going a little too far. He must retract his words or take the consequences!"

"But what could you do, my dear?" said her aunt, anxiously. "By the law of England, you know, a man can say what he chooses of his own wife."

"Yes; and a woman can say what she chooses of her own husband! I have held my tongue hitherto, but I shall do it no longer, and let us see which story gains the greater credence. I have lived my life openly, Aunt Laura, and all the world has acknowledged it to be blameless. Do you think I will consent to sit down in silence now under a scandalous imputation like this, and one which, by your own evidence, has not been confined to a private letter?"

"I don't blame you, my dear. I think you are quite right to stick up for yourself, and I hope you may be successful; but how do you propose to act?"

"I shall find out where he lives and go and see him. I

can not believe but that when we meet he will relent. Aunt Laura, he loved me very dearly once. When I remember *how* he loved me I can not believe it possible that words like these can have been written from his heart. Some one has poisoned his mind against me. He is not very strong-minded, you know. Poor Gerard was always too easily influenced, and absence has weakened my hold over him. Sometimes I feel sure I have only to see him to set things right again. Won't you help me, dear? Won't you try and find out his private address, so that I may communicate with him?"

"My dear Georgie, *I* can give you his address!" exclaimed Marian, "I received it from Mr. Cowan yesterday. It is in Rochester Street, Adelphi."

"Close to Brabazon Chauncey's!" said Georgie, her face lighting up with pleasure. "Tell me the number, Marian, and I will go there the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Had you not better let him know of your intention beforehand?" demanded her cousin, demurely.

"I am his wife," replied Georgie, "and have a right to go wherever he may be. No, I shall not give him any notice of my coming. If I did it would afford him the opportunity to make other arrangements, and I want to take him unawares. I am sure—quite sure—that when he *sees* me he will not refuse to listen to my explanation.

"*Apès?*" said Marian.

"I have not had time to think of that, dear; but if I can not settle the matter privately, I shall do so publicly. To refuse to live with me, on my husband's part, is tantamount to saying I am not worthy to be lived with; and if he continues to make that assertion it must be decided by law. There are ways and means of bringing such an action against him as shall force him to state the reasons he has for spreading the scandal you speak of concerning me!"

"Well, my dear Georgie, it's all over the town, and no one could possibly have invented it but himself. Only think; what other enemy have you in all England but Captain Legh?"

"Oh! I don't know!" replied Georgie, wearily. "Sometimes I fancy all the world is against me. But I have talked enough about myself; let me hear of my other friends. How are the Colvilles? Have you seen the Rals-

tons lately? And is Emily Kirwan married to young Farquhar yet?"

And so, in reminiscences of both sides of the Atlantic the afternoon slipped away.

When Georgie had left them, Marian said to her mother:

"I was so delighted to be able to give her Gerard's address. I don't suppose anything in the wide world would annoy him more than her going to his chambers to find him out! He will turn blue with fright. I saw how nervous he was to-day whenever I mentioned her name. He would not ask me to keep the secret of his whereabouts, but he took care to inform me he was crossing to Paris to-morrow, which I know is untrue. That was in case Georgie asked me, I suppose. He will be in a nice quandary when he hears her knock at his door. I only wish I could be there to see the fun!"

Meanwhile, Georgie, grave but decided, returned to her hotel, full of anticipations of the morrow.

She would not tell Louise of her intention. She had begun to doubt if that lady was as thoroughly trustworthy as she had once believed. She thought how much better it would be to keep her ideas to herself until they were crowned with success. And then, perhaps, she would appear before her with Gerard, to give the lie to her prognostications of the impossibility of their reunion.

She brooded all night over what she should say and do when she met her husband, and was up early the next morning to put it into execution. She wanted to be with Gerard before there was a probability of his leaving his chambers.

She dressed herself in a dark costume that was unlikely to attract notice, and had breakfasted and left the hotel before Mrs. Fletcher was out of bed.

It was a mild, clear morning, at the close of November, and a sickly sun was trying to struggle into existence and light up the world.

Georgie walked rapidly up the Strand, but when she turned into the Adelphi her heart beat so rapidly she was obliged to moderate her paces.

She found it was a different matter to be philosophical about her husband when there was no chance of meeting him, and to maintain her equanimity when they were about to stand face to face.

But she found the number of his chambers, and, summoning all her courage, rang the bell which corresponded with it.

A man appeared to ask her business.

This was the most trying moment she encountered. How she wished then that she had not been so precipitate, but had written to Gerard first and asked him to come to the hotel!

But it was too late for regret. The servant was waiting for her name.

"I want to see Captain Legh!" she said, hurriedly. "Go and tell him his wife, Mrs. Legh, is here!"

The man stared, but went upstairs to deliver the message.

After the delay of a few minutes he returned to say the captain was not at home.

Georgie knew it was a falsehood, and her blood rose at the knowledge. She looked at her watch. It was not ten o'clock.

"You must have made a mistake!" she said, trying to speak quietly. "Captain Legh can not have left the house at this hour! Go and say again that I wish to speak to him."

"It is quite useless, madame!" replied the servant. "I have searched everywhere for the captain, but he is not at home. His servant says he left the house half an hour ago."

"Then I shall go upstairs and wait until his return. Let me pass," continued Georgie, authoritatively. "I am Captain Legh's wife, and shall remain here until I see him."

The man drew back respectfully, though with a look of alarm, and preceded her to the first floor, on which were situated Captain Legh's rooms, to announce her arrival. She was met at the door by a pert chamber-maid.

"There's no one at home. You can't come in," she said, as she leaned on her broom in the door-way.

"This is Captain Legh's wife," interposed the man, with a signal of intelligence to the woman.

"Oh!" ejaculated the chamber-maid, with a toss of the head.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Legh; and you will be good enough

to answer my questions," said Georgie, grandly. "When did Captain Legh go out?"

"I can't say to a minute. About half an hour ago."

"Did he breakfast before he went out?"

"Not here. It isn't often he does breakfast here."

"What did he go out for?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Perhaps to post his letters. He didn't tell me!"

"Well, then, I shall remain here till he returns," said Georgie. "Show me the way to the sitting-room."

At this expressed determination both the servants looked uneasy.

Georgie settled the matter by walking past the chamber-maid into the first open door, which led to a room as yet untouched from the day before. The dust lay thick on the mantel-border and the chairs; the cushions on the couch were piled one above the other, and some empty glasses and dishes on the table showed that Gerard had entertained his friends the previous evening. A piano at one end of the apartment stood open, with some music scattered on it, and Georgie shuddered as she caught sight of a knot of blue ribbon that was lying on the floor. The room was full of pretty ornaments, amongst which were several photographs of female beauty; but she did not see one of her own face amongst them. Gerard seemed carefully to have eliminated everything that should remind him he had so inconvenient an incumbrance as a wife.

She was still examining the different articles when the pert chamber-maid followed her into the room.

"If it's not inconveniencing you, ma'am," she said, "I'll put things to rights a bit. The captain was up late last night, and I've had no time to clean till now."

"I will not stand in your way," replied Georgie; "I will go to my husband's bedroom."

There were but three chambers in the suite, and two she had already looked into. She walked deliberately to the third, and tried the handle of the door. It was locked. She turned round. The woman had followed her, anxious and uncomfortable.

"You can't go in," she said, nervously; "the captain locked the door himself."

"Is he in the habit of locking his door in the morning before his room is done?"

"Yes—no—I'm sure I can't say, ma'am; only it's locked as you see, and I haven't got the key!"

"Never mind," replied Georgie, calmly, "I will wait in the sitting-room. Go on with your dusting. It is of no consequence to me, for I shall remain here until my husband returns!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAST CHANCE.

FINDING it impossible to persuade the unwelcome visitor to take her leave, the chamber-maid renewed her work with unnecessary vigor, knocking about the furniture, banging the cushions and chairs, and kicking up as much dust as she possibly could.

Georgie Harrington felt all the indignity of the situation, but she bore it in silence. The stake she had at issue was too important to be set aside for the vagaries of a servant.

As eleven o'clock struck the woman lighted the fire, and then, going out into the passage, called some one from below, with whom she held a colloquy at the front-door.

In a few minutes a respectably dressed, middle-aged woman advanced to Georgie's side, and made her a courtesy.

"I am Mrs. Holland, ma'am, the housekeeper of the chambers; and as the young woman's work is done, I am about to lock up."

"To lock up?" repeated Georgie, interrogatively.

"Yes, ma'am! The young woman only comes in the morning, and takes her meals elsewhere; and when Captain Legh is away it's my duty to lock up after her, and see that everything is safe!"

"I suppose you mean that you want me to go, Mrs. Holland? But Captain Leigh is my husband, and I am waiting to see him."

"Yes, ma'am, so I understand; but the gentleman's out, and there's no saying when he may be home again—he might be gone for days—so that it is quite impossible you can remain here. You must see that yourself!"

"But surely he would not leave London without letting

you know. The girl said he had gone out to post some letters!"

"*She* doesn't know anything!" replied the housekeeper, tossing her head. "Her work is over, and she is going home, and I must trouble you, ma'am, to go too."

Georgie saw that further expostulations might lead to insult, and so she rose to comply with the request.

"I suppose it *will* be useless my waiting longer," she said, "but I am very much vexed to have missed him!"

"You should have made an appointment," replied Mrs. Holland, patronizingly. "Gentleman as is here, there, and everywhere, ain't to be depended on. This way, if you please, ma'am," she continued, as she piloted Georgie to the door.

The young wife walked down-stairs, feeling ashamed and downcast, as if her identity was doubted, and her motives were under suspicion.

As she reached the vestibule she missed her umbrella, and it was raining. She ran lightly upstairs again in order to reclaim it before the housekeeper should lock the door of her husband's chambers.

As she crossed the threshold she heard the tittering laughter of the two women in the parlor, and saw at a glance that the door of the locked bedroom stood partly open.

In a moment she guessed the truth.

Gerard had been in there all the while. He had instigated his servants to deceive her.

She sprung toward the door. It was slammed and locked again in her face.

"Gerard! Gerard!" she cried, beating with her hand upon the panels. "Gerard, *do* speak to me!"

But there was no response.

The housekeeper hurried into the passage.

"Lor', ma'am, what would you be at?" she said, insolently.

Georgie turned upon her like a fury.

"Hold your tongue!" she exclaimed. "I require neither your assistance nor your advice!"

And then she turned back again, horribly humiliated, and burning with indignation, and walked down-stairs, and out into the open street and the rain.

Meanwhile, inside that locked door, Captain Legh was sitting at a table, with his head buried in his hands.

He, too, had been suffering horribly—more so, perhaps, than his wife; for the misery we bring on our own heads is the hardest to bear. And the knowledge that she was so near had been torture to him, that had culminated with the sound of her voice calling his name.

How he had longed to rush out and clasp her in his arms! But the demon of suspicion kept him back. The thought of the unknown rival ground into his very soul. She was not really *his*—so he told himself. She had only come back for the sake of policy. She could not love him, or she would not have been silent for so long!

And so he nursed his doubt, and made himself doubly wretched, whilst the sweet, well-remembered voice called “Gerard! Gerard!” outside his door.

When Georgie gained the street she ran into Brabazon Chauncey’s office, which was only a few paces off. Her first impulse was to hide herself where no one could see the shame depicted in her face; and in her old friend’s sanctum she knew she should be safe.

“Oh! Mr. Chauncey!” she exclaimed, as she found herself alone with him, “I have been so horribly insulted! I went to Captain Legh’s chambers, that we might come to some explanation together, and he locked himself in his room and told his servants to say that he was out, and they were all laughing in their sleeves to see me made such a dupe of!”

And as she concluded Georgie hid her crimson face in her hands and burst into tears. Mr. Chauncey was genuinely concerned by her distress.

“My dear girl,” he said, “why did you go near him? If you had only asked my advice I should have entreated you not to do so. Captain Legh’s business is to go to you. To his chambers, too! Oh! Georgie, you are very imprudent!”

“Why should I not go to his chambers?” she replied, raising her flushed face to his. “I am his wife—nothing can unmake that—and have a right to go wherever he may be.”

“And a right to be insulted into the bargain, it would seem. What must his servants think of his treatment of

you? You lower your own dignity, my dear child, by exposing yourself to it."

"Oh! I am past caring what other people think or say, Mr. Chauncey! My husband *must* meet me, and refute the insinuations he has made against me, or the matter will have to be settled by law. Give me pen and paper, and let me write to him, since he refuses to speak."

"Be careful what you say," observed Brabazon Chauncey, as he produced what she asked for. "You are so rash, Georgie, I am always afraid of your committing yourself."

"I am his wife," repeated the girl, "and I can not lower myself by any entreaties for a reconciliation. I *must* be reconciled to him, Mr. Chauncey; my life will be worth nothing to me without it!"

Mr. Chauncey shrugged his shoulders.

"I have not lived so long in the world, my dear, without knowing that you women are incomprehensible creatures; and the very thing that is worst for you is the thing you most desire and cling to."

"Will you hold your tongue," said Georgie, "and let me write?"

But she was very careful he should not get a peep at her letter.

"MY DEAREST GERARD,—I have been to your chambers and waited there for an hour, but the servants said you were not at home. I do not believe it is true; and yet I can not think you could have been so near and refused to see or speak to me! What have I done to deserve such treatment at your hands? If the sneer in your last letter means that I have any friend I love better than yourself, it is without foundation. I have never loved any man in the world but you. I am staying at Morley's Hotel. I entreat of you to come and see me there. I will remain in all to-day on purpose to receive you. Dear Gerard, only come and see me, and this miserable misunderstanding will be made up forever.

"Your affectionate

"GEORGIE."

She put the letter in an envelope, and hurriedly sealed and directed it.

"Will you send it at once?" she asked feverishly of Mr. Chauncey, "this very minute?"

"Certainly, *this very minute*," he replied; "Captain Legh can only wait fifteen months without hearing from you, so we mustn't try his patience too much."

"You are very hard upon him, Mr. Chauncey. You seem to forget I never wrote to him."

"We won't discuss the matter further, my dear. But your note shall be delivered at once," and, calling an office-boy, he dispatched him with it on the spot.

"And now let me take you home, Georgie. My carriage is at the door, and it is raining fast."

"Oh! yes, take me home," she acquiesced, "Gerard might come round to see me at any moment."

But as they drove to the hotel she sighed frequently.

"I can't have you fretting over that worthless fellow like this," said Mr. Chauncey. "Let me see, to-day is Saturday. What are you going to do to-morrow?"

"Nothing, that I know of."

"Well, then I shall come over in the afternoon, if it is fine, and drive you and Sissy down to Richmond to dinner. Would you like it?"

"Oh! yes," she said indifferently, "I dare say it will be very pleasant."

"That is a bargain then," he said, as he handed her out at the door. "Perhaps I shall bring Willy Champion, of the Excelsior, with me. He is dying to be introduced to you!"

She nodded to him with a faint smile as they parted; but he thought, as he watched her mount the steps to the hotel, how much she had already lost of the bloom she brought over the Atlantic with her. Two days of suspense and disappointment seemed to have added ten years to her age. Mrs. Fletcher was all curiosity to learn where Georgie had been so early in the morning, but she was not gratified. Miss Harrington had resolved to say nothing of her expedition until she knew its results.

She sent Sissy and Rachel off to the Aquarium, and sat all the afternoon at the window of her sitting-room, watching the visitors who called at the hotel, but Captain Legh was not amongst them. At last the five o'clock post arrived, and brought a letter from him. Georgie tore it open. It was as cold as before.

"I have received your demand for an interview, and my answer is an unqualified refusal. There is nothing left to be said between you and me! You left this country against my expressed wishes, and the link was broken between us then and there. I understand from my servants that you came to my chambers this morning and made a most unpleasant scene. I must request this kind of thing is not repeated or you will drive me to leave them. As it is, I quit town to-morrow for Paris, and shall be absent for an indefinite period. If you have any further communications to make to me they had better be sent through my lawyer.

"GERARD LEGH."

When Georgie Harrington received this letter, she was like a mad creature. At first she laughed hysterically and derisively, and stamped about the room in a fury. And then she fell to weeping so violently that Mrs. Fletcher became quite alarmed.

"What is the matter?" she cried. "Surely you do not still care sufficiently for that man to make yourself ill for love of him?"

"Oh! Louise, have you not yet read my heart! Can not you see that I have never cared for any one else in all my life? And now that he seems to be slipping from my grasp, I feel as if I had never fathomed the depth of my love for him before. It may be weak and foolish, but I love him—I *love him* from the very bottom of my heart!"

"Well, I really can't understand it," said Louise; "for if you loved him, why did you leave him?"

"I don't understand myself. He drove me nearly wild with jealousy, and I did not calculate what I was about. But I know what I feel. I know I have been wretched ever since we parted, and that I shall have no peace till we come together again."

Then her mood changed.

"It is some *woman* who has come between us!" she exclaimed, as she began to pace up and down the carpet, "I am *sure* of it. No one but a woman could be so cruel. But I will find her out as sure as my name is Georgie Harrington, and she shall rue the hour she meddled with my affairs to the last day of her life. I am a good lover, Louise, but I am a good hater also, and I hate that woman without knowing her!"

"I don't know why you should be so sure it's a woman," said Mrs. Fletcher; "I don't think men have behaved so well to you that you should have a better opinion of them than of us."

"A man's way of behaving badly is not the same as a woman's, Louise. Women fawn over us and flatter us to our faces, and insinuate the most horrible things against us directly our backs are turned. I feel certain that Gerard's mind has been poisoned against me by some woman."

"He must be very weak to believe what anybody may tell him," remarked Mrs. Fletcher. "I am sure I always stood up for you. I have told him again and again that I was certain there was no cause whatever for his being jealous of Mr. Brabazon Chauncey, and that there was nothing like a flirtation between you!"

"I hardly think your championship can have been needed in that direction," replied Georgie, coldly. "Gerard can only have been joking when he said anything about Mr. Chauncey; but I can not stand this state of things any longer. It is most unfair to me to cast such a slur on my reputation. I shall write to my husband, and tell him that if he goes to Paris without seeing me it is all over between us forever."

And, seizing her writing-materials, Georgie indited the following lines:

"GERARD,—I give you one last chance. I *must* and *will* see you before you leave for Paris, or I shall put the whole case in my solicitor's hands. I am not going to suffer the indignity you put upon me in silence. I have done nothing that your wife need blush to own, and I claim my right to be by your side as before. Failing this, I shall institute legal proceedings against you for a separation, when you will be forced to state your reasons for your present conduct.

"But oh, my love, don't drive me to it! Think how we have loved each other in the past, and let us try to begin a new life together. I am so sincerely, heartily sorry for my share in it all! I ask your pardon on my knees. Don't drive me from you, Gerard. If you do, I shall return to America, and never see England again.

"Your affectionate

"GEORGIE."

She sent this note to her husband by a private messenger, with orders to wait for an answer. After the lapse of an hour he returned with it.

The paper contained but a few words, but they made Georgie almost happy:

“Give me a few hours to consider. You shall receive my answer on Monday.”

“Excelsior!” she cried, smiling through her tears. “If he stops to consider I am sure he will accede.”

“He only wants time to consult his lawyer,” said Mrs. Fletcher. “Your last note has frightened him. He doesn’t know how much of it is true, and he is going to find out. My dear Georgie, you are very weak; any one could deceive you.”

“I suppose I *am* weak with respect to him!” she answered, sighing; “but I really meant what I said. If he persists in his determination I shall sue him for a separation.”

“I don’t believe you will,” said Louise Fletcher, in an unpleasant tone. “It’s all talk. When it came to the point you would draw back. For my own part, I am positively sick of the subject. Do let us speak of something else. So you are going to Richmond to-morrow with Mr. Chauncey? That will do you good. I wish he had asked me too.”

“I am not sure that I shall go,” replied Georgie; “in fact I do not think I shall. Foolish as it was, Gerard always had a prejudice against dear old Brabazon Chauncey; and if he heard I had gone down to Richmond with him he might be angry, and it would be a pity to vex him now, just as matters have a chance of coming round again. No; I sha’n’t go to Richmond. I shall say I don’t feel well enough.”

“That will hardly be fair to Mr. Chauncey.”

“Oh! he won’t mind! He is awfully good-natured. He only proposed it to please me.”

“But why should you shut yourself up just because Captain Legh chooses to make himself ridiculous?” argued Mrs. Fletcher. “Really, Georgie, you are a goose! Are you going to bind yourself down never to look at another man because your husband has not got common sense? Is

the old round of jealousy to begin over again? It strikes me you had better keep out of it if it is."

"Oh, no, I hope not! But just at this moment, you see, my position is very critical, and I should be so sorry to do anything to disturb his confidence again. Of course it is silly—too unutterably silly—but I love this silly man. That is all!"

"I am very sorry for you," replied Mrs. Fletcher, in a freezing tone. "I can imagine your living with him again as a matter of policy; but for *love*—never!"

"Oh, Louise, you do not know what love is!" cried Georgie; "or you would never talk like that about it! Had it ever any sense or reason? Did it ever stop to consider or to argue? If it did it would not be love—which suffers all, and forgives all, and forgets all! And that is how I love Gerard. It is of no use denying it any longer. My pride has stood out against the truth for a long time, but I think I have no pride left. It seems to have been all washed away by my tears!"

"Worse luck for you!" said her bosom friend, unsympathetically.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SECOND DISAPPOINTMENT.

ON the following day, Sunday, Mrs. Fletcher went out to dine with some friends, and Georgie Harrington (true to her resolution) did not drive down to Richmond with Mr. Chauncey.

He smiled sarcastically and shrugged his shoulders when he heard her decision and the reason of it; but perhaps he admired her all the more for her discretion. He consoled himself by taking Sissy to the Zoölogical Gardens instead; and Georgie went to see the Lacys, and report the progress she has made. She could not help fancying that Marian looked disappointed when she expressed a conviction that all would yet be right between her husband and herself, though neither she nor her mother went so far as to say so.

"Of course, my dear," observed Mrs. Lacy, "if you choose to try to live with Captain Legh again it is your own business, and no one has the right to interfere with you. But I confess I should consider it very lowering for

a daughter of my own. The man has not only ill-treated and neglected you; he has actually taken away your reputation. What more could he have done? And yet he is to be coaxed into allowing himself to be forgiven and restored to his former place. It is incredible to me."

Viewed in this light, her conduct certainly did look *infra dig.*, and Georgie hung her head abashed and uncertain.

"Everybody is very discouraging," she said, presently; "and no one seems to think there is any duty to be considered in the matter. Gerard behaved badly to me—I acknowledge that. I think I had spoiled, and humored, and flattered him to such a degree that he thought he could have it all his own way. I could do nothing with him. He was like a horse that had got the bit between his teeth, and I thought the best thing was to leave him, and let him come to his senses by himself. That was the reason I went to America."

"And he took advantage of your absence to behave worse than ever."

"I have still to get evidence of that, Aunt Laura."

"Well, my dear, I should think you might take my word for it, though there are plenty of witnesses if required. All London knows how Captain Legh went on. The scandal was in everybody's mouth."

"I am very sorry, and very much ashamed," she said, "but I had no right to leave him for so long, and especially without a word of kindness. Doubtless he thought I should never come back again. It is more than half my fault; I am painfully conscious of that."

"Really, Georgie, you are a mystery!" exclaimed Marian. "Where is all your spirit gone? Perhaps it is your fault also that Gerard went all over London, saying you had a lover in New York!"

"But did he do so?" answered Georgie, suddenly flushing up. "I have asked various people already, and they say they have heard nothing of it. A story against a professional gets wind at once in London, especially in her own circle. Stories *may* have been set afloat against me; but if so, I think they are much more likely to have emanated from the lips of some woman than from those of my husband. Gerard, with all his faults, is at least a gentleman."

"My dear Georgie, one would really imagine you doubted

the word of your own relations!" exclaimed Mrs. Lacy, with some offense.

"Leave her alone, mamma, and let her go her own way," interposed Marian. "Before long she will be the first to acknowledge that you were right."

"Perhaps I shall, Marian," replied her cousin, sadly. "I am not so confident of the success of my experiment as you seem to think; but I am sure it is my duty to try it, and I mean to do my duty, whatever may be the result!"

"Well, you are not even sure yet that Captain Legh will condescend to give you the chance of trying. I fancy there are a few obstacles in the way. Lady Henry Masham will do all in her power to prevent it, for one."

"Lady Henry Masham! What has she to do with us?"

"Oh! my dear! perhaps you are not aware that Gerard caught his typhoid fever at Hatleigh House, and that her ladyship nursed him through it like a sister. A nice *sister*, I should say! Sylvia Marchmont was invited at the same time, but she and Lady Henry fell out over Captain Legh, and it ended by Miss Sylvia being turned out of the house. So you see what nice things have been going on in your absence."

Georgie sat silent and troubled.

"I have heard something about Sylvia before," she said, in a low voice. "Some one—from Hull, I think—sent me an anonymous packet to New York, containing some torn sheets from Gerard's diary. It was very dishonorable to take them, still worse to send them to me; but they told me about Sylvia in his own handwriting."

Marian had grown scarlet at the mention of the stolen extracts, but Mrs. Lacy lifted her hands in astonishment.

"And after that you will still go back to him, Georgie! To what purpose?"

"To prove to him that I love him better than any other woman in the world. Aunt Laura, do not let us discuss this matter any further; it is only giving me pain, and it will not alter my decision."

"Well, my dear, you will hardly expect your friends to greet Captain Legh with the enthusiasm you seem disposed to show toward him yourself. *Your* memory may be a conveniently elastic one, but you can not expect us all to be so forgetful."

"I shall not make any demands that my friends are un-

willing to fulfill, Aunt Laura. And you will at least give Gerard the credit of never having been *exigeant* in exacting any intimacy from the members of my family."

As the chief complaint against Captain Legh in times gone past had been the want of cordiality he showed toward themselves, this remark silenced the Lacys for awhile, and left Georgie at liberty to pursue her way homeward.

She spent the night in a fever of anxiety to learn what news the morning would bring her; but it was not until twelve o'clock that the following letter was put into her hand:

"MY DEAREST GEORGIE,—I have been reading over your letters again and again, and I have come to the conclusion to do as you wish. I will meet you, and hear your explanations from your own mouth. But I can not come to Morley's, where probably every waiter has by this time got an inkling of the truth. I would rather meet you somewhere out of town. If you will go down to Brighton, and let me know when and where, I will put off my journey to Paris, and join you there, and I hope that everything may be settled to our mutual satisfaction. A line in reply will suffice for

"Yours affectionately,

"GERARD LEGH."

"*My dearest Georgie!*" "*Yours affectionately, Gerard Legh!*"

The words, although so commonplace, danced before Georgie's eyes in prismatic colors through the glad tears that twinkled in them.

She did not lose a minute in sending him the answer, "I shall go down to Morrison's Hotel at Brighton by the four o'clock express," and set Rachel to work to pack her box, as she was going at once to join Captain Legh in Brighton.

She made no secret of her intention; and notwithstanding Mrs. Fletcher's gloomy looks, dilated on the probable consequence of her undertaking.

"I know how it will end, Louise; Gerard will take me to Paris with him. Oh! what a holiday it will be! And, in that case, you will look after Sissy and Rachel, won't you, dear? I do not suppose we shall be absent more than a fortnight."

"I will if I remain here," replied her friend, dubiously; "but, as I told you, this hotel is too expensive for me for long, and I am thinking of boarding with the Camberleys in Kensington."

"Not just yet, Louise; stay here as my guest till I return. You know how glad I shall be to defray all expenses whilst you are looking after my little Sissy."

"You seem to make very certain of the result of your interview with Captain Legh."

Georgie's bright face clouded.

"Am I *too* certain, do you think? Don't scold me for it, Louise; let me be a little hopeful; it is so long since I have known the feeling. No, Rachel, you are not going with me to-day. If I do not go on to Paris with Captain Legh, I shall probably send for you and Miss Sissy. But I shall write to Mrs. Fletcher and tell her all my plans; and meanwhile you will remain here under her direction."

She started in the same cheerful spirit, never doubting but that her star was already in the ascendant. At the Victoria Station she looked eagerly about her, almost expecting to see her husband's well-known figure, and then blamed herself for being so childish as to feel disappointed because he was not there.

As soon as she arrived at Brighton she drove to Morrison's Hotel, and ordered a suite of rooms.

"My husband, Captain Legh, will join me here to-morrow," she said, with a feeling of pride, to the head-waiter, "and will require a dressing- and bath-room. Bring me the visitors'-book, that I may inscribe my name." And she wrote it down in full, as she very seldom did, "*The Honorable Mrs. Gerard Legh!*" and thought how nice it looked when it was written.

But the evening hours, spent all alone, dragged wearily away; and she could not help wondering, had *she* been the one to keep the appointment, if she could have let Gerard wait for her so long. She was obliged to devise some method by which to make the time pass, and amused herself whilst daylight lasted by looking at the sea, and thinking that to-morrow she and Gerard might be doing the same thing together.

She retired to rest as early as was possible, hoping she might sleep till the morning light; but it was a futile hope. A dozen times she left her bed to pace up and down the

room, and picture the meeting in store for her. What should she say or do to make her husband understand how deeply she regretted the past—how freely she forgave his share in it—how earnestly she desired to make him happy for the future? Once let her find her way to his arms again, she thought, and she defied all womankind to drive her thence.

At last she lay down, utterly exhausted by the excitement she had passed through, and slept until nine o'clock. The first thing she thought of on waking was her letter. Surely the morning post from London must have come in? She rang her bell, and asked the question. The chambermaid said it had arrived an hour before. Georgie sent her down to make inquiries on the subject. She was certain there must be some mistake; a letter for her was lying in the hall below. But she only received an answer in the negative. No letter for Mrs. Legh or Miss Harrington had been left at the hotel.

The disappointment was keen but brief; and in another minute Georgie was quite ready to take a hopeful view of the matter. Gerard had never said he would write; he had promised to join her. He knew now where she was, and would probably be down by the eleven o'clock train.

Having settled this with herself, Georgie got up and dressed with the utmost care. She arranged her sunny chestnut hair half a dozen times before she was satisfied with its appearance, and robed her graceful figure in a silken peignoir of eau-de-nil, in which she looked like a sea-nymph who had assumed modern costume for a short time to come on shore at Brighton. Her anticipations of future happiness had flushed her usually pale cheek like a delicate sea-shell, and her blue eyes were feverishly brilliant.

She could not eat her breakfast; but kept on wandering restlessly between the table and the window, first wondering if Captain Legh could possibly get down so early, and then laughing at herself for being such a simpleton as to suppose so lazy a fellow would be induced to leave his bed and get into a train by eight o'clock in the morning.

At last, when noon had struck, and she was nearly ill from the waiting and suspense, a telegram was put into her hand. Surely it was to tell her the train by which to expect him! But when she opened it the words ran thus:

“Can not come to Brighton. Have changed my mind. Will write.”

The pink paper fell out of Georgie's nerveless hands and fluttered to the ground. It was a twofold blow, coming after that day and night of happy anticipation. *“Have changed my mind.”* What could have made him change his mind?

She sat down in mute despair, with her two hands clasped over her throbbing brain, and tried for hours to solve this puzzle, but in vain.

What could he have heard more than he had already heard? There was nothing left to tell. Her life might lie open before him like a book! Why should he have acquiesced in her wishes yesterday and denied them to-day? What was the use of thinking? There was nothing for her to do but to wait as patiently as she could for the letter of explanation that was to follow. By the time it came she was prepared for anything, and read it with dry eyes and a steady voice.

“Your letters bore so much the appearance of truth that I wrote to you yesterday that I would meet you (as you entreated me to do), and hear your explanation of the rumors that have reached me during your absence. Since then, however, I have been informed that you had not been a day in England before you were to be seen driving about town in intimate intercourse with Mr. Brabazon Chauncey, a man to whom you know I always had an unmitigated aversion, and that on Sunday you dined with him at Richmond. This shows me so palpably that you have not the faintest notion of your duty as a wife that I cancel the promise I made to see you. From this moment let all connection be severed between us.

“GERARD LEGH.”

When Georgie read this letter the predominant feelings in her breast were a righteous anger and indignation that her husband should dare to insult her in so pointed a manner. All the softness she had felt toward him ever since she heard of his illness fled, and she turned cold, and hard, and vindictive.

“Since then!” she repeated to herself, with clinched teeth. *“Between yesterday at noon, when he sent me that*

note and received my reply, and this morning when he wrote this letter! Then he must have heard it last night! *Where* was he last night, and *who* told him? I will find out, if I search till the day of my death. A dozen people may have known that Chauncey drove me back to Morley's—why should I conceal it?—or that he intended to take me down to Richmond! He may have mentioned it himself, or I may have done so; it is so difficult to remember! But who is it that has been cruel enough to repeat the story with a malevolent intention to Gerard? *That* is the question that I must and will have answered! Well," crumpling up the note between her fingers, "I suppose it is really over now between us, for *I* can do no more. I have humiliated myself quite sufficiently before him. It is *his* turn now; and until he comes to my feet I shall make no sign. I have given him his last chance of peace with honor! If he wants it now he will have to ask for it, for I shall never speak again! But oh, my heart, can it really be over? How shall I go through my work and live my life without him?"

She threw herself on the bed face downward as she spoke, and all the response the chamber-maid could get to her various offers of assistance was that the Honorable Mrs. Gerard Legh was ill and tired, and wished to be left completely alone!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A NEW FRIEND.

It was her last weakness.

When Georgie Harrington rose in the morning she was firmly resolved upon two points. One was that, sooner or later, she would find out the person who had come between her husband and herself. The other, that she would so live her life before the world that Captain Legh should bitterly rue the day when he had demanded that all connection should cease between them.

She had felt tenderly toward him lately. All the flood-gates of her imperishable love had been thrown open; and had they met she would have been ready to throw herself, her fortune, and everything she possessed, at his feet.

But a second rebuff was more than she could bear. It

made her feel she had humbled herself once too often, and she had to call on her natural pride to support her under it.

So she had done with entreaties forever. She had sighed her last sigh—wept her last tear. Whatever she suffered in the future should be hidden within the recesses of her own breast. She would go into public, and win her triumphs as of old. She would reinstate herself in society, and court all the admiration she could gain. She would show Captain Legh that *his* verdict was not the verdict of the world, and that if he did not consider her worthy of his regard there were plenty who did.

Georgie was not the sort of woman to arrive at this determination, and then sit down and cry instead. She was impulsive and warm-hearted, but she had also a large amount of common sense and resolution.

As soon as the shock of looking her shattered hopes in the face was over she commenced to act, and her first move was to write directions to Louise Fletcher to send Sissy and Rachel down to Brighton at once.

She did not give her friend any reason for the alteration in her plans; she knew that she would hear it soon enough—or, if not, that it could be confided to her with more dignity at a later period. The only person to whom she told the truth was Mr. Brabazon Chauncey, and to him she sent a letter that brought him at once to Brighton.

“My dear girl,” he said, as he met her, “we won’t discuss this business. It is one of those things to which the old proverb applies, ‘Least said, soonest mended.’ I have only come to ask if I can be of any possible use to you or Sissy.”

“You have only come, as you always do,” said Georgie, smiling, “to try and help me out of a difficulty. But I am not so downcast as you may imagine. That last letter has cured me. I see now how foolish I was to believe that he was capable of improvement. My pride has had a whipping, that is all; and there is really no harm done. On the contrary, I feel as if I had come out of an illness, and was ready to begin my life over again.”

“And what is that life to be, Georgie? Would you like to go back to America? I have just received a heart-broken letter from Maxim. He says that, notwithstanding the forfeit you paid him of thirty-two thousand dollars (an exorbitant sum, by the way, my dear, and I wonder you

ever consented to it), he feels he has lost a fortune through your canceling your engagement, and begs me, as soon as it is possible, to make another contract with you on his account. You can go back to the States to-morrow if you choose."

"But what are you saying, Mr. Chauncey? I never paid Mr. Maxim that sum! It was *two* thousand dollars! I have the check stump in my desk."

Brabazon Chauncey pulled a letter out of his pocket.

"Here it is in Maxim's own handwriting; thirty-two thousand dollars! and I don't think he's a man to hide his light under a bushel."

"I don't understand it at all," replied Georgie; "a friend paid him the money for me, and I don't remember his giving me any receipt; but I am sure it was not so much as you say."

"Never mind that now. It was a swindle on old Maxim's part; but it's done past recall. The question is, will you return to America?"

"Not at present, Mr. Chauncey. The attitude which Captain Legh has assumed toward me is an imputation on my character, and I mean to live it down. Were I to go back to America it would look like guilt. He might say anything of me as soon as my back was turned, and the world might believe him. No! I have made up my mind to remain in England, and show him that I have not forfeited my place in society, whatever he may be insolent enough to say or think. I will do twice as well as I have done before, and I will lead such a life that the world itself shall make him confess he is mistaken. I will never receive him back again, Mr. Chauncey, until he asks my forgiveness on his bended knees. And he shall do it of his own accord, for I will not raise my little finger to encourage him!"

"Bravely spoken, Georgie! I am rejoiced to find he has left you with so much spirit. He will be the first to regret this rupture, never fear; that is, if he has any manliness left in him. Well, if it is to be London, what do you say to the Royal Consort? Mr. Annesley was in my office, talking about you yesterday. He wants you to create a part in a new melodrama, by Peril and Ommaney. It will be a big piece, with a 'star' part, and the cast is fine.

They open in March, which will give you time for a holiday, if you want it."

"I do want it very much, and I shall spend it quietly down here with Sissy. And if Annesley will give my terms, I will take the engagement at the Royal Consort. It is just the house to suit me."

"Of course he will give your terms; I will take care of that. Well, then, we are to consider it settled? I know you will like the character; a wife who shoots her husband in a fit of jealousy and then poisons herself; just the sort of thing you'd do! It will suit you down to the ground."

"What a libel!" cried Georgie, with affected gayety. "Am I doing that sort of thing now? Really, Mr. Chauncey, you give me no credit at all for being sensible."

"I think you're just the bravest and most sensible woman I ever met," he answered. "But, Georgie, I want to warn you against one thing! Don't tell too much of your affairs to Mrs. Fletcher; she is not only foolish, she is untrustworthy. She repeats everything she hears, with her own embellishments; and she is not true to you!"

Georgie looked very grave.

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Mr. Chauncey. I was hurt by several little things that occurred between Louise and me whilst we were away, but I thought they were more due to her folly than anything else. I have always believed her to be attached to me, and quite incapable of repeating anything to my detriment. Of all women, she best knows what I have suffered; I have not kept a circumstance of my married life from her; surely she could never be so base as to misrepresent my feelings or actions to others."

"I say nothing, my dear, except be careful of her. I never liked your intimacy in the old days, but she will have more power to hurt you now you are separated from your husband than she had before. Are you sure she has had nothing to do with this final rupture between you?"

Georgie opened her blue eyes incredulously.

"*Louise!* Oh! dear, no! How could she? She has not set eyes on Gerard since our return; and if she had she would have refused to speak to him. She would never be so base as to keep friends with him and with me at the same moment. Besides, you should hear her speak of him, Mr. Chauncey; nothing is too bad for her to say; she thought me the weakest creature in the world to dream of

making up our quarrel. Oh! no! I could believe anything of Louise but *that*."

"I only want to warn you, Georgie; there is no harm in being careful. And now I will leave you, my dear, for I must catch the three o'clock train; and I will write to you concerning the Royal Consort engagement in a few days."

Sissy and Rachel arrived in due course, and Georgie began to spend a healthful and quiet life with them by the sea-side, a life in which she had time to review her past and plan out her future. If, with her reminiscences, there sometimes mingled a vague regret that she had so hastily cast aside Hiram Boch's proposal, who shall blame her?

She had thrown up all her prospects for the sake of a man who was utterly ungrateful, and did not value any sacrifice she made for him.

She had lost, as it were, all the headway she had made by going to America, and found herself, after fifteen months of schooling, at the same point where she started. And she might, had she listened to reason, have been freed by this time from the shackles that bound her, and at liberty to commence a new life; yet she never contemplated replacing herself in that position.

A line from her pen would, as she well knew, have brought Mr. Boch home by the next mail to renew his arguments and his entreaties, but she did not wish it to be so. Her whole aim was not to purge the memory of Gerard Legh from her heart, but to imprint her own so indelibly on his that it should haunt him by night and day; and the first help toward that end came to her in a very unexpected manner.

Each morning whilst she remained at Brighton she took her walk under the sea-wall with Sissy, and before long she had made the acquaintance of a lady who systematically brought her children to the same place. The lady was young and pleasant-looking, though not handsome; and the children, three little girls, varying from three to seven years old, took an immense fancy to Sissy, which first made their mother stop and speak to Miss Harrington. Perhaps, too, she had been attracted by Georgie's uncommon beauty, for, contrary to the custom of English women, they became quite sociable and friendly without even knowing each other's names. Neither of them was accompanied by a servant, for the strange lady appeared (like Miss Harring-

ton) to revel in the society of her children, and not unfrequently the two women would join in a game of romps with the little girls, and laugh as loudly as any of them.

One morning, when the fresh sea-breeze was rather boisterous, and the sun had become too furious for the elder ones, they sat down, panting, on a bench together, their hair blown over their faces and their attire in general disorder.

"Really," said the stranger, "these children are almost too rough sometimes. Alice has nearly pulled my hat off my head. I am afraid my little ones are very rude. I hope they have not torn your mantle!"

"Oh, no, indeed!" replied Georgie. "I love children, as you may imagine, or I should not romp with them. My little sister is as bad as any of yours, and she is old enough to know better."

"I must say I like to bring my little girls out alone; they seem to enjoy themselves so much more without their nurses; they spend too much of their time in the nursery, poor wee mites!"

"I suppose you find, like most people, that society makes too many demands upon your time?"

"It is not only that!" Then suddenly changing the subject, the stranger asked: "Are you living in Brighton?"

"Oh, no! I am only staying here for a change with my little sister."

"So am I! I brought the children down here after the measles, and my husband is in Scotland. I am so lonely. I wish you would come and see me—that is, if it would be agreeable to you. There is my card!" and the lady thrust it into her hand.

Georgie read the inscription, and colored deeply.

It was "*The Viscountess Moberley.*"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LADY MOBERLEY.

GEORGIE did not know what to say.

Lady Moberley perceived her confusion, and attributed it to reluctance to accepting so unorthodox an invitation.

"I know it is not very regular," she added, smiling, "to ask you to visit a person to whom you have never been

introduced, but I thought, as we are two ladies living alone, we might waive ceremony. We have met and conversed together now for more than a fortnight, and I feel as if you were quite an old friend. But if you have any objection—" she said, blushing, and stopping short.

"Indeed, Lady Moberley, you are quite mistaken. I feel only too much honored by your desire to know more of me. Only it is impossible. If you knew who I am—"

"I know you are a gentlewoman," said Lady Moberley.

"Yes, I *am* that!" replied Georgie, proudly, "and I am not aware of any other reason why you should not receive me at your house. But your family might object to it, because—I am the wife of Captain Gerard Legh!"

"*Of Gerard?* Are you really Gerard's wife?" exclaimed Lady Moberley, eagerly. "Are you Miss Harrington, the actress?"

"Yes, I am Georgie Harrington; and now you see why I can not accept your invitation. My husband's family have elected not to recognize me, and Lord Moberley would probably be angry with you for infringing their decision. Therefore—with all due thanks to you—I must decline."

"But it is a shame—it is a horrible injustice!" replied her companion. "Only to think you should be my sister-in-law, and I can not befriend you as I should like to do. For I suppose I must ask Moberley's leave first, at any rate."

"I beg your ladyship will do no such thing," rejoined Georgie, "for Lord Moberley's consent would make no difference to me. I have done nothing that should prevent my husband's parents from noticing me; but as long as they hold aloof the patronage of the other members of the family would be of little avail."

"But have you not left Captain Legh?" inquired Lady Moberley, curiously.

"Certainly not, in the sense you mean! I left him to fulfill a professional engagement in America, from which I have only just returned. Lord Kinlock knows the motives which took me there; I explained them to him myself."

"Then Lord Kinlock is acquainted with you!"

"He visited me once, as a matter of policy, and I explained to him fully my relations with my husband. Since my return to England Captain Legh has refused to see me.

I am quite ignorant of his motive in behaving so; but I shall wait patiently until he sees he is mistaken."

"Miss Harrington," exclaimed Lady Moberley, "I think you are a dear good creature, and I like you awfully! I have never got on with my husband's family. I think they are a set of starched-up prigs; and if Moberley had been anything like them I never would have married him. I know several members of your profession, and I reckon them among my best friends. It seems hard I shouldn't include my own sister-in-law in the number. But you mustn't be too proud. Promise me that, if Moberley sees the matter in the same light I do, you will consent to come and visit me and be my sister. I feel we should get on so well together. I took a fancy to you the very first day we met."

"You are very, *very* kind!" replied Georgie, "and should Lord Moberley consent, of course I shall not be so silly as to refuse. But don't let us talk of it, for it will be all the harder if he sets his face against our acquaintance, as I can not but believe, in deference to his parents' wishes, he will."

"Oh, you don't know Moberley!" cried her ladyship, laughing. "He dislikes the family ways and rules as much as I do, and does not wish anything in our house to be conducted after the fashion of Summerhayes. Not that they all are so strait-laced. Lord Kinlock is a dear old man, and Lady Alice is very nice; it is the mother and elder sister who hold out against you, and of course since you left Gerard you are a great deal worse in their eyes."

"They should take the trouble to ask first how Gerard treated me," said Georgie.

"Yes, dear, that's just it," replied Lady Moberley. "He's a horrid temper I know, and so was Moberley till I brought him to his senses. Well, I suppose I must be going in; it's past the children's dinner hour. Come, Alice and Helen, go and fetch baby off the sand. Good-bye, Miss Harrington; give me a kiss; I will be your sister, dear, always, whatever the rest may say."

And with a parting salute the warm-hearted little lady hurried away with her children, leaving Georgie to speculate on the upshot of the unexpected discovery she had made.

* * * * *

Helen Moberley was very different, both in mind and disposition, from the members of her husband's family. Perhaps that was the reason that Lord Moberley had chosen to marry her. She was an only child, and an heiress—spoiled, as girls born under such circumstances are apt to be, and allowed to have her own way in everything. Her way was a very pleasant one, however; and her husband treated her much as her parents had done, so she ruled the house.

It is needless to say that her conduct did not at all times command the approval of Summerhayes. Lady Kinlock hardly knew what to make of her. She claved herself to the old theory—descended to us from a barbarous age when women were treated no better than cattle—that wives should submit themselves to their husbands in all things, whether right or wrong, and be but a milk-and-water copy of the man. She was quite shocked, therefore, at the liberties Lady Moberley took with the grave and sober viscount, and the open manner in which she expressed her opinion on all she saw and heard at Summerhayes.

She was never awed at anything. She ridiculed Lady Hester's frumpish way of dressing her hair, and beguiled Lady Alice into taking a walk on Sunday evening instead of going to church for the third time. She pulled her father-in-law's hair, and sat on her husband's knee before the servants. In fact, she was always doing something which, in their estimation, she ought not to have done, and yet they did not feel at liberty to reprimand her as they would have done, because she was Lord Moberley's wife and the future Countess of Kinlock. And her crowning offense had been her openly attempted defense of her brother-in-law's marriage.

Lord and Lady Moberley were staying at Summerhayes when Gerard announced the awful fact that he had married an actress. The grief and shame at the news were universal. Lady Kinlock retreated to her room and refused to appear in public at all, and the Ladies Legh went about with pursed-up mouths as if there had been a death in the house. Even Lord Moberley and his sister wore solemn faces whenever the subject was raised. Only Helen was cheerful over it, and demanded if Captain Legh at six-and-twenty were not old enough to know his own mind on so important a matter as marriage, and if his own antecedents

had been so blameless that they need be ultra-particular about his wife.

She even enlisted a theatrical friend of hers in the cause, and made him find out all about Miss Harrington; and when his letter arrived, bearing the most favorable reports of her character, talents, and social position, she read it aloud in the face of the assembled family; but her kindly interference did no good. The Kinlocks could not overlook the awful disgrace which had fallen on their honored name.

Gerard's previous peccadilloes—his gambling and extravagance at college—his disreputable behavior in the army—and many other scrapes in which he had been detected since, all fell into insignificance compared with his having married an honest woman who earned her own livelihood. And Lady Moberley did not find her husband much more tractable than her parents-in-law. He did not abuse his brother so vehemently perhaps, but he evidently thought he had ruined himself for life. He shrunk from the idea of the actress being introduced to his wife—in fact, he absolutely forbade it.

Miss Harrington might be all very well in herself, perhaps—indeed, he went to the Delphian “on the sly,” and thought her the most beautiful woman he had ever seen; but there was no knowing what her connections might be, and he would not run the risk of his Helen becoming acquainted with people beneath her in station. So Lady Moberley, who was quite ready to rush up to London and offer her friendship to her new sister-in-law, was not allowed even to write a line of congratulation on the subject, and for the first time thought her husband unreasonable and unjust.

From this preamble it may be imagined she would display some nervousness in telling Lord Moberley of the unexpected discovery she had made in her acquaintance of the beach; but nerves were not in Lady Moberley's line. The viscount came down to see her and his little girls on the Saturday following the interview described in the last chapter, and he had hardly been ten minutes in the house before she attacked him straight from the shoulder.

The day was frosty; Lord Moberley had had a cold journey down, and seated himself close to the fire. In another minute her ladyship had perched herself upon his knee.

"William Charles Godfrey Algernon St. Clair," she commenced (it was a joke of hers, when she wished to be playful, to address her husband by his long string of names), "I have something very particular to tell you. You know that I'm always making mistakes. I made a mistake when Alice was born, and another with Helen, and a third with baby; but you were obliged to forgive me all the same, because there was nothing else to do. And now I've made a fourth mistake—at least *you'll* say so; and you'll have to forgive me this one also, and for the same reason."

"Where is it?" said Lord Moberley, pretending to look round the room for a baby.

"Don't be silly, you old stupid, you know I don't mean that! But during the last fortnight I have made the acquaintance of a most charming lady on the beach. I have been out alone in the mornings with my chicks, and she was always there with a little girl, and we used to talk together while the children were playing."

"That was very imprudent of you, Helen. In your position you should be more careful. How can you tell *who* you may meet in a place like Brighton? Really, you are a perfect child!"

"Now, don't scold till it's over. There's heaps more to come. I haven't even *begun* the bad part of it. Where had I got to? I wish you wouldn't put me out so. Well, I made great friends with this lady—in fact, she's the very nicest person I've ever known—so charmingly pretty."

"None the better for that, I'll bet," grumbled the viscount.

"Yes, sir, she is all the better for that! Just you keep your opinion to yourself till you're asked for it. She's charmingly pretty, and clever, and sweet, and I like her down to the ground; so I asked her to come and see me here."

"Worse and worse!" muttered Lord Moberley. "When will you learn prudence?"

"When you learn not to interrupt me; so I shall have plenty of time in which to get it up. Really, William Charles Godfrey Algernon St. Clair, your manners are becoming quite unbearable! I wish you'd copy me instead of your mamma. I asked this lady to come and visit me, and gave her my card; and who do you think she turned out to be?"

"How should I know? The Countess of Cranbourne Alley, I suppose; or the Duchess of Seven Dials."

"Oh, dear, no, nothing half so aristocratic, but something a thousand times nicer than all your horrid old duchesses and countesses put together! *Miss Harrington!*"

Lord Moberley stared at his wife as if he didn't believe her.

"Miss—*Who?*"

"Miss Harrington—the actress. Gerard's wife! Don't pretend not to understand. You look just like an old owl blinking at me out of your carroty eyelashes."

The next moment Lady Moberley was put off her husband's knee on to the hearth-rug.

"What did you do that for, you horrid old man? I *shall* sit on your knee if I feel inclined!"

"Helen, I am seriously displeased with you!"

"What for? What have I done?"

"You know perfectly well that to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Gerard Legh is the last thing in the world I wished you to do. For four years my family have steadfastly refused to receive her."

"More shame for your family, then! I think Alice and Hester ought to be whipped for it, and Lord and Lady Kinlock, too! In fact, I'd like to whip them all round myself!"

"Helen! will you be good enough to remember you are speaking of my father and mother?"

"Of course I remember it! That's why I want to whip them! Why have they refused to receive her? She's a great deal better than they are!"

"You are no judge of that, Helen, nor of their reasons for acting as they have done. You were quite aware, however, of my wishes, and you have disobeyed them."

"No, I haven't, William Charles Godfrey Algernon St. Clair!"

"Oh, do stop that nonsense! It is beneath you!" said Lord Moberley, in a tone of vexation.

"Well, then, take me on your knee again, or I sha'n't tell you another word."

"You are a spoiled girl!" exclaimed his lordship, as she scrambled up and covered his face with kisses; "but I know you are true. Tell me everything, my dear, and let me advise you for the best."

"There is not much more to tell, Will. We did not find out each other's names until we had made friends, and I had seen for myself how sweet and good she is. Oh, I perfectly adore her! She is the most charming creature I have ever met. I am not in the least surprised at Gerard marrying her; my only wonder is that she ever took *him*!"

"But you must have heard that they are not even living together. That is not very respectable, Helen."

"Has any one ever told you the reason, Will?"

"My father mentioned something about it to me, but I confess my interest did not extend to curiosity upon the subject. It was only what I expected when I heard of the marriage. An ill-assorted union never turns out well."

Lady Moberley stamped her foot.

"You are just like all men, Will, pig-headed and unreasonable! You know what your brother is. You warned me against being too intimate with him when we were first married. You have always called him a scamp and a *vaurien*!"

"And so he is," interposed Lord Moberley. "Gerard has been in a scrape ever since he left Eton. Always in debt, or a fix of some sort; and such a violent temper, too, that no one could attempt to reason with him without getting insulted!"

"And yet because a sweet, dear woman like Georgie Harrington finds it impossible to live with him, you lay the blame on her head. Why, Will, she is a thousand times too good for Gerard, and his parents ought to go down on their bended knees and thank her for having burdened herself with such a 'ne'er-do-well.'"

"I am afraid it would be a long time before you got my father and mother to see it in that light," replied Lord Moberley, laughing.

"I dare say it would, because they are so stuck-up in their own conceit; they think no one is good enough for them. But if they once saw Georgie Harrington, without knowing who she was, they would soon change their opinion."

"Is she really so delightful? I know she's a beautiful woman, because I've seen her."

"Where have you seen her?" asked Helen, quickly.

Lord Moberley looked sheepish.

“Well, I happened to look in at the Delphian one night when she was on the stage, and—”

“Oh, you sneak!” cried his wife, “never to take me! And so you have really seen her? And isn’t she lovely?”

“Very lovely!”

“Oh, it is a sweet face, and her manners are just as sweet. And she is a true lady, Will, in every particular. I flatter myself it would take less than a fortnight to show me that.”

“You are a stanch advocate, Nell. Has she told you anything of her relations with Gerard?”

“Nothing; that is what I admire her so for. I know he has treated her badly; but she has not uttered a syllable against him. All she said was, when I remarked that she was all the worse in the Kinlocks’ eyes for having left Gerard, that they should inquire first how Gerard had treated her. She tells me that she went out to America to fulfill a professional engagement, and that she is quite ignorant of any reason why Captain Legh should have refused to receive her on her return. But she will wait patiently until he sees his error.”

“I am greatly afraid the blame in that instance must lie at Gerard’s door. I confess that I have never heard anything against *her* character, Helen; and I *have* heard a great deal against his. The men at the clubs are talking very freely about him and certain other people just now. It is very disgraceful!”

“While his poor darling wife is down here all by herself, with her little sister. Will, did you know that she is a daughter of Captain Frederick Harrington, of the artillery? Didn’t we have a Captain Harrington once down for the shooting at Pittswood?”

“Of course we did. George Harrington of the Tenth. He’s a cousin of the artilleryman. Do you mean to tell me that Gerard’s wife’s father was poor old Fred? He fell in the Ashantee war. Is it possible? Are you sure you are not mistaken?”

“I am quite sure. We talked over all these matters before I knew she was Gerard’s wife. Harrington is a common name you know; and I could tell from the way in which she mentioned certain people’s names that she was as familiar with them as we are. Oh, she is such a dear! She refused to come and see me when she heard who I was

(and indeed I wouldn't have urged her, Will, without your consent); but I kissed her when we parted, and told her I should always feel like her sister. And so I shall, whatever happens."

"Helen," said Lord Moberley, thoughtfully, "what do you want me to do in the matter?"

"Oh, you darling, I knew it would come to that! Well, I want you to go with me and call upon her, and tell her how sorry we are for this long estrangement, and ask her to our house, and try and make up to her for the way that wretch Gerard has behaved to her. You know what your father told you last year before she went to America."

"I am perfectly aware that Gerard has disgraced himself as a husband as well as in every other condition of life. But granted that this Miss Harrington is all you think her, Helen—good, pure, and lady-like—there still remains that insuperable objection to your being on terms of intimacy with her—the fact of her profession. I can not get over it."

"Then why do you let me receive Mrs. Garnett, and Miss Fitzroy, and Mr. Coverston? They are all artists. And you asked Signor Carnelli down for the shooting season once at Pittswood."

"That was to amuse our guests, darling. They are not our relations, thank goodness! Everybody knew the footing on which we received them."

"And could you be such a cad, Will—"

"My dear Helen, I wish you would pick your words!"

"I am picking them, and using the most suitable I can find. Would you be such a *cad* as to ask people as guests to your house whom you do not consider worthy to be friends of your wife, just to get out of paying them for their services? And when we have such a lot of money, too."

"My dear child, you have such a strange way of putting things."

"I have a *just* way of putting them; and I never thought I should feel so ashamed of my husband," said Lady Moberley, half in tears.

"But, my darling, I did not mean that!"

"What did you mean, then? Miss Harrington is a dear good girl, much better than you or I, or any of your stuck-up people at Summerhayes—and she is a gentleman's

daughter, and your brother's wife. But because she is an actress she is not fit to be received here as our sister. Will, I positively hate you for being so mean!"

"No, don't say that, Helen; it hurts me."

"And besides, the action we maintain against her is so impolitic. She might be Countess of Kinlock any day; and then how would you all look?"

"How do you make that out?"

"I have no son, and she may have one; and then if you die, and your father, of course Captain Legh will succeed to the title."

Lord Moberley laughed till the tears came into his eyes.

"You have killed us all off very quickly, Nell. However, I think you are so far right that we may have stood off a little too much in this matter. But if I let you call on Mrs. Gerard Legh, what will the *mater* say?"

"What does it signify what she says?" replied Lady Moberley, pouting. "I'm sure she needn't talk; she calls upon poachers and all sorts of disreputable characters. One day she wanted me to go and hear a dying thief relate his experiences; but I wouldn't. Georgie Harrington can't be worse than a dying thief any way!"

"You silly child, can't you see that the charm of the thief lay in the fact of his dying? But since you have been thrown into personal contact with my brother's wife, I acknowledge that it would be a double slight to ignore her now. Do you know where she is staying?"

"At Morrison's Hotel."

"If I let you call on her will you promise me not to become too intimate?"

"No, I won't promise anything at all. I am intimate with her already. I tell you I *love* her, and I want her for my sister! Oh, Will, don't refuse me!" exclaimed Lady Moberley, twining her arms round his neck. "I have never had a sister, you know. Those two prigs at Summerhayes are not worthy of the name. And I do love Georgie so! Say I may do just as I like about her!"

Lord Moberley might have stood out against sulks and pouts; but he could not resist those arms, and the feel of his wife's soft lips against his own. Women are unwise who try to get their own way through any art but that of wheedling. It is a little science in itself; but, unlike other

sciences, you can not go too far with it, and it is very seldom known to fail.

"I give in," said Lord Moberley, as she released him. "I feel it is weak-minded and ignominious, but I give in. We will call on Mrs. Gerard Legh together, Helen, and ask her to come and dine with us. I think I can trust your judgment; but should it be at fault in this instance, I flatter myself we stand too high not to be credited with having stooped to be gracious to a person who has been thrown directly in our way by marriage."

"There can be no stooping with regard to Georgie," said Lady Moberley. "She is infinitely better in every respect than half the people we know!"

"She has a faithful ally at all events in you," said the viscount, kissing her cheek; "and you have won her cause."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FAMILY CONCLAVE.

GEORGIE HARRINGTON had not seen Lady Moberley since the day they recognized each other on the beach. She did not wish to see her. She fully believed that her husband would refuse his consent to an intimacy between them, and she was too proud to court it.

So she and Sissy walked no longer under the sea-wall; and to all the child's inquiries why she might not go to meet her little companions as before, Georgie returned evasive answers.

But she felt anxious, nevertheless. She could not help seeing the advantages that an acquaintance with some of the principal members of Gerard's family would be to her, and especially at this moment, when she needed the protection of her friends. And she liked what she knew of Helen Moberley, and believed that they would understand each other.

She was therefore delighted, and somewhat fluttered, when a few days afterward the cards of Lord and Lady Moberley were put into her hand.

She rose to receive them with a grace that was peculiarly her own, and the viscount was ready at the first glance to second his wife's opinion of her.

"Now, Georgie," exclaimed her ladyship, as familiarly as if she had known her all her life, "I have brought your brother-in-law to make your acquaintance, and to tell you in person how sorry he is it should have been so long delayed."

"Indeed, Mrs. Legh," said Lord Moberley, "my wife only speaks the truth. These family dissensions have been most painful to me; but when the elders lead the way it is difficult for the younger members not to follow. And Gerard has such a peculiar disposition; he aggravates matters by his obstinacy and perverseness, instead of trying to smooth them over."

"You owe me no apology, Lord Moberley," replied Georgie, with her sweetest smile. "It was not to be expected you should fly in the face of your father and mother for a person you had never seen. And, as you say, my poor husband is not disposed to be conciliatory under opposition."

"When did you last hear from him, Mrs. Legh?"

"Just after I had come down here. I fully expected he would pass my holidays with me; but he changed his mind. He is living in chambers in London, as doubtless you know, and seems to prefer that life to any other."

"We have seen very little of Gerard since you left England, Mrs. Legh, and that little I have not liked. I am afraid he has got into a bad set. It is a pity you should not be living together."

"No one thinks so more than I do, Lord Moberley. I threw up my engagement in America when I heard of his late illness, and returned home for the sole purpose of condoning the past, and beginning life anew with him. But Captain Legh refuses to be friends. He professes to have some trumpery and unjustifiable charge against me, which prevents our living together again. Therefore, I have prayed my last prayer to him. If ever we are reconciled the request must come from *his* side. I am too proud," said Georgie, drawing herself up, and blushing like a rose, "and too conscious of my own innocence, to ask twice where I have been refused. I would die first!"

"I admire your spirit!" cried Lady Moberley.

"At the same time," continued Georgie, still addressing the viscount, "I am aware that the position lays my conduct open to suspicion, and, for that reason, I must decline

all friendship that is not offered to me for my own sake. I should be so deeply grieved to bring anything like censure on those who have wished to show me kindness."

"You must not imagine that *we* have any doubt on the matter, Mrs. Legh. If it were so, Helen and I would not be here to-day. But, to tell you the truth, I consider my brother is behaving very badly to you. I know what you have done for him in the past, and I do not believe you would have left him at all unless it had been absolutely necessary."

"Indeed—*indeed* I would not!" said Georgie, in tears. "I have loved him dearly—I love him still—but he seems to be possessed with an evil spirit, that makes him reject all my overtures of peace."

"Never mind," said Lord Moberley, kindly. "Depend upon it, Gerard is under some bad influence, which will pass away in time. He can surely never hold out against you for long, and I would bet anything that he is far more miserable than yourself. Meanwhile, my wife and I will do what lies in our power to lighten the burden to you."

"Yes, that's right, Will!" exclaimed Helen. "And first of all, Georgie, we will taboo such an unpleasant subject. If we are to talk about Gerard every time we meet we may as well put on black at once. What are you going to do this evening?"

"Nothing in particular, Lady Moberley."

"No! You must call me 'Helen,' or I shall call you 'Mrs. Legh.' Well, then, you must come for a drive with us as far as Shoreham, and dine with us afterward, will you? And send Sissy and the maid over to our place at once to spend the afternoon with my three girls; they've been asking for her every day."

"I will do so with pleasure," replied Georgie, her heart warming with the cordiality of her new friends.

The rest of the day was spent in close intercourse, during which Lord Moberley drew from her a detailed account of her dealings with her husband, and read plainly how much her heart was with him through it all.

Her beauty, and talent, and general demeanor made a deep impression on him, until he was almost as captivated with her as his wife had been, and quite as ready to do battle in her cause.

Indeed, when he had ascertained from her own lips the

truth of her birth and connections, and the motives which led to her adoption of the stage, he thought how wrong they had all been not to make such inquiries before.

But it was chiefly Gerard's fault. He had been so offended by the way in which the first announcement of his marriage had been received, that he had obstinately shut his mouth on the subject since, and really led people to believe there was some cause for their animadversions.

But though Lord Moberley acknowledged he had been mistaken he did not know how he should make the truth known at Summerhayes; and when he had seen Georgie into the carriage which was to take her home at night, and returned to the presence of his wife, his expression of dismay was comical.

"She is a lovely creature," he said; "there is no doubt of that, and charming in conversation. I think Gerard is a perfect idiot to leave her down here by herself. But I don't know how on earth I shall tell the old people she has been to visit us, Nell! They'll bring the house down about our ears!"

"Oh! nonsense, Will!" returned her ladyship; "I'm not afraid of them if you are! Do you suppose I'm going to have my acquaintances chosen for me? Your mother knows better by this time. Don't you remember her coming to town to lecture me about keeping Roccani's little girl while she went to Italy? Bringing an actress's child into my nursery with *her* son's daughters! I thought the old lady would have had a fit. However, I let her talk, and Ida Roccani remained with us for a month. That's how I settle matters!"

"But *this* is much worse than the Roccani business, Nell. I shouldn't wonder if my mother and sisters refuse to enter the house for fear of meeting Mrs. Legh."

"Oh! let them stay away then; it will be no loss!" exclaimed Lady Moberley, impatiently. "I'm sick of your mother, and her affectation of religion, Will. It is no religion that teaches her to be so uncharitable toward her fellow-creatures. Let me settle this matter with them, will you?"

"I shall only be too glad, my darling, if you can; and keep me out of it," said Lord Moberley.

"Oh! yes! I'll keep you out of it, you old coward! I'll

just mention the circumstance naturally in my next letter to Summerhayes, and see what they say."

What Lady Moberley called "mentioning the circumstance naturally" was, that she added a postscript to this effect:

"By the way, Mrs. Gerard Legh is staying down here for her health. I saw her on the Parade the other day; she is such a pretty woman, and so elegantly dressed; everyone was looking at her."

"That doesn't *say* anything," she thought, as she folded her letter, "but it gives scope for plenty of remarks."

If she had heard the remarks it gave scope for she would have thought she might as well have thrown a thunder-bolt into Summerhayes.

Lady Kinlock sent for her husband and her two daughters, and having read the postscript in solemn conclave, asked their opinion as to what ought to be done.

"What *can* you do?" replied the earl, rather testily, for he retained a vivid remembrance of his beautiful daughter-in-law. "I suppose Brighton is as open to Mrs. Gerard Legh as to any one else. Do you wish to deprive the poor girl of recuperating her health, just because you have taken a dislike to her?"

"Kinlock, I am surprised at you," said the countess. "You must know I was thinking only of Helen. She must leave Brighton; she can not remain in a place where she may be brought in daily contact with that woman. Why, Mrs. Legh might go the length of addressing her. I have heard that actresses will do *anything*!"

"You have heard a great deal of rubbish," grumbled her husband.

"Kinlock, you are not looking at this matter in a proper light. What is Moberley about to allow Helen to remain there? You must write and tell him to remove his family at once. I am sure he is the last person to wish to see them tainted by such contact."

"I shall do no such thing, my dear. You may do your dirty work yourself. Moberley would probably tell me to mind my own business. Don't you think he's old enough at thirty-five to mind his? And as for her little ladyship, she has given you a taste of her quality more than once before, and I wouldn't meddle with her affairs if I were you."

"That is just what I am afraid of," replied Lady Kin-

lock, with an uneasy toss of the head. "Lady Moberley has been allowed to have so much of her own way that I should never be surprised at anything she might do. She would disgrace our family if it suited her convenience. You know that I have never approved of Helen, Kinlock. And that is why this postscript frightens me. If this unfortunate connection of ours is really so handsome and striking in appearance—"

"She is all that, my dear. You may take my word for it," said the earl. "But I didn't know the pretty creature was home again. Where is that idiot Gerard? Helen doesn't mention him. If he had been in Brighton, though, he would have been sure to call on Moberley."

"Oh, she's alone doubtless. Those sort of people will do anything to make themselves peculiar. But it is most improper that it should be so. As for Gerard, you know he has not been near us for the last five or six months."

"I suppose after late events that he concludes we don't want to see him," said the earl. "One of you girls might have gone to him when he was ill. It was most unsisterly to refuse."

"We didn't like to, papa," replied Lady Hester, primly, "without your sanction or mamma's. We did not know but what *she* might have been at his bedside."

"And if she had she wouldn't have poisoned you!" roared the earl. "You talk of this lady as if she was something too vile to mention. I won't have it. This sort of thing has gone on too long. It's a disgrace to a Christian household, and so I tell you once for all. I can't stop your mother's tongue, but I can yours; and if either of you speak of your sister-in-law before me in that way again I'll make you rue it! So now you understand me, and all you have to do is to obey."

So saying Lord Kinlock walked out of the room and banged the door behind him.

The women looked at one another in dismay.

"I never saw papa so angry before," said Lady Alice.

"He'll be ordering us to go and see her next I suppose," said Lady Hester.

"No, my dears—no! *that* you shall never do!" rejoined Lady Kinlock. "If your poor papa can be deluded (like most of his sex) by a pretty face, never mind to *whom* it may belong, your mother is here to guard and protect you.

Against poor Gerard of course I say nothing. He is your brother, and you must be kind to him when you can, for he needs it sorely. But you know how I have always set my face against the stage and all those who uphold its iniquity. Do you imagine, then, that under *any* circumstances I would receive an actress as my daughter-in-law? Why, I blush even when I think of her. I am afraid to look at a newspaper for fear of reading her name!"

"They are full of her just now, mamma!" exclaimed Lady Alice. "She is to appear at the Royal Consort Theater in March, in a new drama called 'Haunted,' and there were two columns in the 'Court Journal' to-day about her doings in America."

"I wonder you can read such things, Alice," said Lady Hester, reprovingly.

"I wonder at it, too," chimed in their mother. "I should have thought the subject would have made you turn away at once to another part of the paper. When will you learn, Alice, to look on this unfortunate business in its proper light?"

"Well, I don't know that I particularly want to read about her, mamma; but I must say I begin to feel a little tired of always hearing her abused. It really seems as if Gerard were no longer our brother since he married her."

"In a great measure he is not," replied Lady Kinlock, coldly. "He has at least forfeited all claim to our respect and esteem. But we will not discuss this unfortunate business any further. Hester, my dear, I should like to speak to you in my own room."

Lady Hester followed her mother dutifully to receive a confidence of which Lady Alice was evidently not considered worthy.

"I have been thinking," said the countess, "how we can best preserve Helen from the danger of becoming acquainted with this unhappy young woman, and I have decided to speak with her in person. You know how little effect my letters have had upon her hitherto; besides, one can not say all one would wish in writing; therefore I shall go down to Brighton myself and take you with me."

"*Me, mamma!*" exclaimed Lady Hester, not relishing the task of opposing Lady Moberley in anything she might have set her heart upon.

"Yes, my dear; but don't say a word to your papa or

your sister about it. Kinlock would possibly oppose my going at all, and Alice would chatter the news all over the house. We must set about it very prudently."

"But can we leave Summerhayes without papa's knowledge?"

"You silly girl!—of course not! We will go and stay a week in town with your aunt Bainbridge, and we can easily run down to Brighton for a day from her house. But we will start to-morrow; there is no time to be lost."

The countess, who had quite as much *finesse* as women of the world when it suited her purpose to exert it, made all her arrangements so quietly that the earl had no idea of the ulterior motive that influenced her visit to London.

She had scarcely been a day at Mrs. Bainbridge's, however, before she told her she must go down to Brighton. She was so anxious to see her dear little grandchildren after the measles; for Lady Moberley's accounts of the baby, who was rather delicate, made her feel uneasy. She could not think that Brighton was quite the place for them at that time of the year; she wanted to judge for herself, and hear what her dear daughter-in-law had to say on the subject.

So she took Lady Hester and went down without any pomp or retinue, putting up at the Bedford Hotel on arriving.

It was a fine day in January, although the wind was cold. Lady Kinlock and her daughter shivered as they walked along the King's Road on their way to the temporary residence of the Moberleys. But when they arrived there they found her ladyship was not at home. The servant did not think she would be long, and invited the visitors to walk into the drawing-room and wait for her.

The countess, who was chilled through, said she would decidedly like to go to the fire, and they followed the man upstairs.

The room was not empty, as they expected. A lady sat in a very home-like attitude in one of the lounging-chairs. She rose as the strangers entered, and they found themselves face to face with Georgie Harrington!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN ACCIDENT.

OF course Lady Kinlock and her daughter did not know Georgie Harrington; they had never even seen the pictured presentment of her face. Lady Alice, during her infrequent visits to London, may have gazed furtively at the photographs of the popular artist in the shop windows; but Lady Kinlock and her elder daughter would have hurried by with averted eyes, had they imagined that such an indignity would meet their gaze. Besides, they had not the slightest idea that Lady Moberley was already acquainted with the black sheep of the family. It was the calamity they had hastened down to avert.

All they saw was a slight, graceful, high-bred-looking woman, with an uncommonly lovely face, and dressed in the latest Paris style, who rose from her seat and bowed as they entered the room. They were taken, like everybody else, by her appearance at first sight, and supposed she must be one of Lady Moberley's aristocratic friends whom she had invited to stay with her at Brighton. Neither had Georgie any suspicion of their identity. The servant knew their titles, but it was not his business to introduce them to a stranger. He merely ushered them into the room, set chairs for them, stirred the fire into a blaze, and took his leave, saying that his mistress would not be long.

Georgie glanced at the new-comers, and seeing an elderly woman dressed in black, with a very frumpish-looking younger one by her side—both very plain in feature and common in appearance—concluded them to be some of Helen's Brighton acquaintances, and prepared to do the honors of the house till her return. She was justified in taking this responsibility upon herself. Her friendship with Lady Moberley had made rapid strides in the last few days. Helen was not the woman to do things by halves. She could not have patronized a relation. She must either cut her altogether or admit her freely to the advantages which were her right. So she and Georgie had become very intimate and spent all their days together, and behaving in every respect like sisters.

On the present occasion Miss Harrington had come as usual to pass the afternoon at Helen's house, and finding she had gone out for an hour, removed her walking-cos-tume and prepared to wait for her return; but she was too un-English to permit strangers to occupy the same room with her without addressing them. She had not the capability of staring people out of countenance for half an hour in silence, until some accident should make them speak. So she advanced a little to meet Lady Kinlock and her daughter, and said, in her sweet, grave voice:

"Lady Moberley went out about half an hour ago; but I don't think she will be long, as she never stays out late in the afternoon. Will you not draw nearer the fire? It is very cold to-day, is it not?"

"Bitterly cold," replied the countess, taking another chair. "I don't think I ever felt a sharper wind. It seems to cut one in half."

"Brighton is rather celebrated for that sort of thing at this time of the year," replied Georgie, smiling. "I want to persuade Lady Moberley to leave it; it is getting too cold for any one but the aborigines."

This sentiment corresponded so well with Lady Kinlock's views that she fell in with it readily.

"I think the same as you do, madame; it is much too cold a place for little children. By the way, can you tell me how the children are?"

"Oh! they're very well and strong. Brighton has done them nothing but good till now. But Lady Moberley has a cough."

"Ah!" said her ladyship, as if *that* were not of so much consequence; "she can look after herself. I suppose you are staying here?"

"Yes," replied Georgie, thinking she meant staying in Brighton, "I am staying here."

Then her hospitable thoughts on behalf of her sister-in-law went out to tea, and she rang the bell.

"John, put on more coals, and bring tea for these ladies. Is Lady Moberley not home yet?"

"No, madame," said the man, as he withdrew to execute her orders.

Whereupon the countess felt certain that Georgie was some distinguished guest of the house, and engaged in conversation with her freely.

They spoke of the weather, and the inconvenience of the current fashions. They discussed the relative merits of town and country. They even compared the advantages of England with those of other lands, and yet not a single word passed between them to betray the identity of either.

The tea was served, and Georgie poured it out and handed it to the two strange ladies, who, supposing her to be at the very least a relation of the duchess of this, or the countess of that, were quite captivated by her grace and courtesy, and ready to pronounce her one of the most charming creatures they had ever seen.

But Lady Kinlock returned more than once to the question of Brighton being too cold for the children, and Georgie felt just a slight curiosity to know why these apparent strangers should be so interested in the welfare of Helen's little flock.

"If you are a friend of Lady Moberley's, as I am sure you are," observed the countess, "you really should persuade her to take her little ones back to town. These cold winds are so very dangerous after the measles.

"I don't think her ladyship has any fear on the subject," rejoined Georgie, blithely, "but I suppose she will abide by the advice of her doctor. I believe he is quite satisfied with the children's condition."

"But this is not a nice place out of the season," persisted Lady Kinlock; "so many queer characters about."

"It is nearly empty now," said Georgie, quietly.

"Well, I don't know," rejoined her ladyship, "I've heard that there are a great many objectionable people here; and a woman in Lady Moberley's position can not be too careful with whom she associates."

"I quite agree with you; but I believe she knows no one here, nor is she likely to do so. She only came for the benefit of her children."

"That is all right then," said Lady Kinlock, more graciously; "and since Lady Moberley has her own friends round her, she can not need the society of strangers."

"No, we keep pretty much to one another," replied Georgie, with one of her fascinating smiles.

At that moment Lady Moberley's thundering knock was heard upon the door. The footman gave her the information that the Countess of Kinlock and Lady Hester Legh were in the drawing-room with Mrs. Gerard Legh, and she

flew upstairs white with terror. What had happened in her absence? Should she find them all stretched upon the floor, weltering in their gore? But Georgie met her upon the threshold, calm and smiling, and she perceived at once that they were all equally ignorant who they had been speaking to.

"Helen, dear, here are some ladies waiting to see you. I have been doing the honors in your absence. What a time you have been!"

She kissed her sister-in-law as she spoke, and then retired to the back drawing-room, which was divided from the front by a velvet *portière*. Since the mistress of the house had arrived she considered it more becoming in her to retreat to the background and leave Lady Moberley at liberty to converse with her guests.

But her little ladyship seemed strangely fluttered and ill at ease. Her mother-in-law's sudden appearance had thrown her off her balance. She had not expected her innocent postscript to have produced such immediate results, and she did not know exactly what to say. Since Lady Kinlock was evidently ignorant who Georgie was, she determined to keep her in ignorance as long as she could. But it was impossible to prevent Gerard's wife guessing the names of the angels whom she had entertained unawares. They cropped out at every other word of the conversation, which could be distinctly heard from behind the velvet *portière*.

"Dear me! who would have thought of seeing you here?" cried Lady Moberley, as she hurried to greet her mother and sister-in-law. "When did you come to Brighton? Is Alice with you?"

"No, my dear Helen, Hester and I are alone; and we came down from London (where we are staying with Aunt Bainbridge) this morning. I could not rest until I had seen and spoken with you. Your last letter disturbed us terribly!"

"And what was there so dreadful in my last letter?" demanded Helen, braving it out, for she knew well enough to what Lady Kinlock alluded.

"The postscript, my dear," replied the countess, with a significant glance toward the back drawing-room. "The person you alluded to in it. Her proximity has filled us with alarm. No one can tell what might come of it. And

I want you to leave Brighton in consequence—in fact, you *must*.”

“I don’t think there is anybody but Moberley who has the right to use that word to me!” said Helen, spiritedly, “and he has not said it yet. But I don’t think this is quite the time or place to discuss the matter, Lady Kinlock. We can surely find something pleasanter to speak of!”

She would have called upon Georgie then and there to return and take her part in the conversation, only she would have to address her by name, and she dreaded what the countess might say or do if suddenly brought into contact with her.

Great ladies have been known to be not much more choice in their words or manners, when thrown off their guard, than laundresses or fish-women.

“Just as you please, my dear,” replied Lady Kinlock, with an air of offense, “but if I don’t speak to you about it, I must to my son! By the way, is Moberley down here with you?”

“He happens to be down here to-day, but he returns to Pittswood to-morrow. I drove him as far as Rottingdean just now, and dropped him there to walk home. He doesn’t take enough exercise. He is growing altogether too stout.”

“Will he be at home this evening?”

“I suppose so. I have heard nothing to the contrary!”

“Well, I’m glad to see you have a congenial friend staying with you, Helen!” said Lady Kinlock, with another significant glance at the *portière*. “A lady like that is sufficient to keep all lower influences out of the house. Even if people who shall be nameless were to try and force their acquaintanceship upon you, you would still have to bear in mind the duty you owe to your friend!”

“Who *is* she?” continued the countess, in a whisper, which Helen pretended not to hear.

“People are not in the habit of *forcing* their acquaintance upon me,” she answered. “I am not the sort of woman to be *forced* into anything, Lady Kinlock. When a thing seems right to me, I do it, whatever others may say!”

“But you would always consent to be influenced by your husband, my dear!” exclaimed the countess, who was beginning to be alarmed by Helen’s determined manner.

"Oh, yes, I am always ready to listen to Will!"

"Or to your friends. I am sure such a refined-looking gentlewoman as met us here could never counsel you to do anything that was beneath yourself!"

"I am sure of it too!" replied Lady Moberley.

"Who is she? What is her name?" whispered Lady Kinlock, for the second time; and Helen was on the point of braving all, and telling her, when the door was thrown open without ceremony, and the servant rushed in with a face blanched with fear.

"If you please, your ladyship, you are wanted downstairs immediately. His lordship has met with an accident!"

"*An accident?*" the three women echoed together.

"Oh, what is the matter? What has he done to himself?"

"If you please, your ladyship, here is the doctor!"

And then it was to be seen that a stranger was following close upon the footman's heels.

"Have I the pleasure of speaking to Lady Moberley?" he said, hurriedly, as he entered the room. "Your ladyship must not be too much alarmed, but there is no disguising the fact that his lordship has met with a severe accident, and we have brought him home."

"Is he dead?" asked Helen, faintly.

"Oh, no; decidedly not! But I fear he is injured. He was found lying at the foot of the cliffs at Rottingdean, and it is supposed he missed his footing, and fell over."

"Oh, he will die!" cried the wife, in a voice of despair.

"I am sure he will die!"

At these words, regardless of the consequences, Georgie rushed out of her retreat to try and console Lady Moberley.

To her consternation, she had learned but too plainly from the conversation in the front drawing-room that she had been playing hostess to her august mother- and sister-in-law.

The circumstance would have afforded her amusement, had it not been for the possible blame that might accrue to her kind-hearted Helen. But when she overheard the terrible news about Lord Moberley, she thought of nothing but trying to be of use. She would have braved half a dozen indignant aristocratic families to requite, in ever so small a measure, the kindness she had received, and the

first arms that were extended to support Lady Moberley's swaying figure were those of Georgie Harrington.

"Courage, courage, dear!" she exclaimed. "It may not be so bad as they represent. Let us go at once and see what is to be done for him."

"I am afraid your services would be useless, madame," observed the surgeon, who had accompanied him home, "for his lordship is unconscious, and it is impossible to ascertain what injuries he has received until we have undressed him and put him into bed; but I do not like to bring him upstairs."

"Take him into the back dining-room," said Georgie, authoritatively, "and we will have a bed put up there at once. Helen, dear, you had better come down with me and learn the worst; any certainty is better than this suspense."

She gave the necessary orders to the servants, and led Lady Moberley to the side of her husband almost in a breath; whilst Lady Kinlock and Lady Hester remained in the drawing-room, speechless and useless from alarm.

Lord Moberley, quite unconscious, was lying on a stretcher in the hall, carried by two policemen, and attended by three or four persons who had witnessed the accident.

Helen could not question anybody. Her face was streaming with tears, and she could only bend over her husband's insensible form, and try to stifle her sobs.

It was Georgie who procured her the information she was longing to receive. Lord Moberley, it seemed, had left her carriage at Rottingdean with the intention of walking home along the cliffs. How or why he had fallen nobody knew; but some people on the beach had seen the accident, summoned a doctor, gone for a stretcher, and accompanied his lordship home. And that was the extent that could be ascertained. Georgie rewarded them all round liberally, and got them out of the house as quickly as she could, by which time the bed had been carried down and prepared in the back dining-room, and the unconscious Lord Moberley was placed upon it. The doctor had already sent off an urgent summons for the best-known surgeon in the town, and they proceeded together to examine the injured man.

Lady Moberley refused to quit the room during the examination; but Georgie bethought herself of the mother

and sister upstairs, and went to see if she could afford them any comfort.

She found Lady Hester sobbing violently, and the countess, though silent, with her face buried in her handkerchief. The old lady's grief touched her the most of the two, and she was the first to whom she addressed herself.

"You must not despair, Lady Kinlock," she said, gently, "Lord Moberley has every assistance that is necessary. Mr. Olderton has arrived, and they have already got him in a bed in the back dining-room, and are examining his injuries. They may not be serious, you know; of course he is unconscious; he could not fall such a distance without becoming so; but he fell on sand, not beach; that is one comfort; the men who picked him up told me so."

"Oh! are you *sure* he's not dead?" said the countess, clutching her hand.

"I am *quite* sure; the doctors have said so over and over again. And Lady Moberley is so brave; she is bathing his head whilst the surgeons examine his body. Try and bear up, Lady Kinlock, and hope for the best; the suspense will soon be over."

"I wonder if they have made up their minds yet? How I long to know! but I have not the courage to ask."

"I will go and ascertain for you," said Georgie.

"Oh! how kind you are! What should we do without you!" exclaimed the countess, as she left the room.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A RECOGNITION.

THE examination of Lord Moberley by the medical men resulted in the discovery that, although his body was severely contused, the chief injury he had received was a concussion of the brain, the ultimate effects of which it was impossible at present to determine. It was one of those miserable cases in which the anxious watchers are informed that all they can do is to wait.

Lady Moberley, who was truly attached to her husband, sat down like an image of despair by his bedside and refused to stir. The countess and Lady Hester remained in the drawing-room silent and tearless, but white with suspense, awaiting the verdict of the doctors who remained in

close attendance on the injured man. The servants lingered about the hall and passages in hopes of hearing some news of their master. Everything was thrown out of gear. The dinner was placed on the table at the usual time, but no one partook of it. It seemed as though it would be a sacrilege to eat whilst the head of the house lay between life and death.

Lady Kinlock had crept down to her son's room after awhile, and gazed sorrowfully at his motionless form, which could scarcely be seen to breathe, but she could not command her feelings sufficiently to stay there. The medical men would not permit of any noise or emotion in the sick-room. So the mother returned to her daughter and only shook her head when Lady Hester asked for information concerning her brother.

In the extremity which had so suddenly fallen upon the household, Georgie Harrington was the only creature who was of any use; and after a little while the others turned to her for everything, as if she had been the ruling spirit here. It was she who thought of telegraphing for the earl to come down and give the comfort of his presence to his wife and daughters. It was she who went into the nursery at the appointed hour and took the place of Lady Moberley in hearing the little ones say their prayers, and persuading them to go to bed quietly without saying good-night to mamma, because poor papa had such a bad headache. Then she carried a cup of tea into the sick-chamber with a noiseless step, and made poor Helen drink it as she sat by her husband's side. She even persuaded Lady Kinlock and Lady Hester to take a cutlet and a glass of sherry as the night wore on, by reminding them that it was their duty to keep up their strength in case it should be needed. And she did all this without the least air of authority, and not even because she wished to win the good-will of her husband's relations. She had almost forgotten, in her sympathy for their distress, that she was attending on Lady Kinlock and her daughter, and most certainly she had forgotten that they were two women who had affected to despise her profession and herself.

Georgie's heart was large and generous, and any genuine trouble appealed to it at once. She saw only in the objects of her present solicitude a mother and sister whose hearts were trembling with fear for the safety of a beloved and

valuable life, and she would have comforted them to the best of her ability if they had been her greatest enemies.

Lady Kinlock was not a strong woman. She had suffered much mental trouble on account of Gerard, and it had weakened her health.

As the hours wore on, and no favorable news was received from the sick-room, she became faint and weary, and Georgie and Lady Hester implored her to go to bed.

"I promise to wake you if any change takes place, and give you the first intelligence of it," said Georgie; "but if you sit up any longer you will be quite worn out."

"I could not rest in bed—indeed I could not," urged the countess. "Every sound in the house would make me spring to my feet to listen. I must remain here with you and Hester."

Georgie did not argue the matter further, but, leaving the room, returned with a silk quilt and several pillows, which she arranged upon a lounge near the fire.

"Now, dear Lady Kinlock," she said, "you will lie down here I am sure, and take what rest you can for your husband's and children's sake. And I will sit close to you, so that if I even move you will be aware of it."

She placed the old lady on the sofa and covered her up warmly, and then took a seat within reach of her. The countess stretched out her hand and placed it upon that of her unknown friend.

"I don't know what I have done that you should take such an interest in me, but I thank you sincerely for it. You have been the greatest comfort we have had in this time of distress."

"I am very glad if I have been of use to you, Lady Kinlock. But who would not feel for you under such a misfortune as this?"

Lady Kinlock began to weep plaintively.

"A misfortune indeed! If the worst should happen, I can not calculate the effect it would have on his father and myself. The future head of the family! My only son! Pray Heaven their efforts on his behalf may be successful!"

"But you have another son surely," said Georgie, with a tremble in her voice.

"Ah, yes; but a greater trouble than comfort to us—Captain Gerard Legh! Such a handsome fellow; not at all

like my poor dear Moberley. But he has ruined himself and us. I hardly think of him now as a son."

"He must have done something very bad indeed to make you say that," observed Georgie.

"I grieve to say he has gone diametrically opposite to our wishes in everything. He was wild and extravagant both at school and college, and he has ended (as doubtless you have heard from Lady Moberley), by associating himself with a set whom we can never receive nor acknowledge."

"I don't quite understand you. Tell me what Captain Legh has done," replied Georgie.

She felt that before long she must confess who she was. Lady Kinlock had approached the subject more than once; but Lord Moberley's accident had driven everything out of their heads but himself. But with the cessation of their suspense, however it might be ended, Georgie Harrington felt certain their curiosity would revive. How could they, when it came to thanking her for her assistance in their distress, do less than demand the name of the person to whom they were indebted? So, with the courage of despair, she led on to the attack herself.

"What has estranged you from your younger son, Lady Kinlock?" she asked a second time.

"He has made a most unfortunate marriage, my dear. His wife is a person whom I can not possibly receive at Summerhayes, which of course cuts him off also from all intercourse with us."

"But I thought he was separated from his wife?"

"We have heard something of the sort; but we are not sure if it is true. At any rate my poor son has not told us so. But we have not seen him now for several months. Sometimes I think we shall never see him again."

And Lady Kinlock turned her face away from Georgie, and began to cry.

"You love him still, then?" said the girl, softly.

"Dearly, dearly! Gerard was always my favorite child; that is why I have felt his conduct so terribly. It has been a fearful blow to me."

"Is this—this lady he has made his wife such a *very* bad woman, then, that you can not even speak to her, Lady Kinlock?"

"I would not go so far as to say she is a bad woman, my

dear, for I do not know her; but she belongs to a profession which renders her unfit to associate with me or my daughters. She is a common actress, appearing nightly on the public stage for the amusement of the crowd. Doubtless you know nothing of such persons. It is not likely you should, for no lady who values her reputation would mix with them. But why do you move? Is the fire too hot for you? I like to feel you are near me. The only hope I have for my poor Moberley seems written in your face."

"I—I—do not think you are quite correct in your estimate of actresses," said Georgie. "I know several who are not only gentlewomen, but good and pure, which can not be said for everybody, even in *your* class of life you know, Lady Kinlock."

The countess raised herself in her surprise.

"*You* know actresses, my dear? Surely you do not understand me. You may have met them in crowded rooms—I have heard that our poor dear flighty Helen has occasionally invited professional people to her house to amuse her guests—but you can not have received them as your intimate friends!"

"Yes, I have. Perhaps you will despise me for it, Lady Kinlock, but I even know the lady of whom you have spoken—Mrs. Gerard Legh, your son's wife."

"I can hardly believe my ears! If a cultivated and refined woman like yourself can speak of my poor boy's wife in such measured terms, she must be a very different person from what I have imagined. Do you know that she is down at Brighton at the present moment?"

"Yes, I know it."

"Why, it is for that very reason Lady Hester and I came down here. I was so dreadfully afraid our poor thoughtless Helen might be drawn into an acquaintanceship with her, though there is little chance of it now. Do you know that you would very much oblige me by giving me your candid opinion of this young woman?"

"My *candid* opinion might not be so flattering as that of other people, Lady Kinlock, for I know her weaknesses as well as her better qualities. But I can tell you so far—she is a lady—as much so as yourself—and she has never been contaminated by the profession you stand so much in dread of. She has always worked honestly at her calling,

and she has had two safeguards against all temptation—her love of principle, and her love of her husband.”

“She does love him, then?” cried the countess.

“She loves him *passionately*!” replied Georgie, in a voice full of emotion; “but she is very proud, and much too high-spirited, and he has offended her so much, that it is doubtful if they will ever live together again.”

“Dear me! your account interests me very much, though I ought to have guessed my son would never marry any one but a gentlewoman. Do you know him also?”

“Yes, I know him—very well.”

“And Mrs. Legh really is a good woman, then?”

“Oh, no, I would not say that, it is too much. She has *tried* to be good in her life-time, but circumstances have been very much against her. Only she loves her husband—rest assured of that.”

“And why are they not living together then?”

“I am afraid some one has come between them. For Gerard—I mean Captain Legh—*did* love his wife very dearly once; but he has a high temper, as your ladyship must know, and it came between them and their happiness, until she left him to go to America, and they have not met since.”

“Do you think my son has behaved badly to her then?”

“I am sure he has behaved most unjustly, if he imagines there is any good cause that they should not come together again.”

“You seem very much interested in this young lady.”

“I *am* interested in her. How could I not be? Her life is my life. Her sorrows and her joys are alike my own. For have you not guessed, Lady Kinlock, who I am? Can not you see that I am Gerard’s wife herself!”

She did not cast herself down before the countess, nor perform any other melodramatic feat as she confessed the truth. She only sat a little apart—swaying herself gently to and fro upon the ottoman—and gazing fixedly into the fire. Lady Kinlock and Lady Hester both started to their feet with surprise.

“Do you know what you have said? Do you really mean it? That you are my son Gerard Legh’s wife?”

“I am his wife,” answered Georgie, simply. “I should not have approached you without your knowledge, under ordinary circumstances, but Lord Moberley’s accident

seemed to call for my assistance. Don't imagine for a moment that I wish to intrude myself upon you. You know that for all these years I have never even attempted to make your acquaintance. And in the morning (or when I can be of no further use to Helen) I will return to my hotel, and you can let things be as they were before."

"But, my dear, they never *can* be as they were before," replied Lady Kinlock, warmly. "Your attention to me to-night is something I can never forget. Besides, you are not at all the sort of person I pictured to myself. I can hardly believe, even with your assurance, that you are Gerard's wife."

"There are plenty of people to bear witness for me," said Georgie, with a sad smile; "and Gerard himself, though perhaps he regrets the fact, would scarcely think of denying it. But I will go and see how Lord Moberley is going on."

She left the room at this juncture on purpose to let them recover from their first surprise, and have an opportunity to decide how they should behave to her for the future. As she disappeared the mother and daughter gazed at each other in mute dismay.

"Mamma, what are we to do?" exclaimed Lady Hester.

"Do, my dear? Why, seeing her has completely revolutionized all my ideas. I was never so mistaken in my life before. I shall do what your father has been urging me for the last twelve months. I shall invite her to visit us at Summerhayes."

"Perhaps she won't come," suggested Lady Hester. "She seems a very proud sort of girl to me."

"There was no pride in her when I needed her comfort. Hester, this has been one of the most humiliating discoveries I have ever made. I thought she was one of us at the very least. And to think I should have been speaking of her all this while as if she was lower than a servant! I ought to have placed greater confidence in my son's choice."

Lady Kinlock was not a bad-hearted woman, but she was vain and bigoted. She had too much opinion of herself and her religion, and had considered it impossible she could make a mistake. But she was very fond of her son Gerard—fonder than she would ever admit—and the fact that a reconciliation with Georgie would go far toward a recon-

ciliation with himself, may have had some weight in deciding the future attitude she intended to assume toward her.

"I have been frightfully mistaken. I must set matters right between us," she was reiterating as Georgie re-entered the room. There was a smile on her face though the tears were in her eyes.

"I bring you good news, Lady Kinlock," she said quickly. "Lord Moberley is conscious, and the doctors say he will do well."

"Let us thank Heaven!" cried the countess, as she sunk upon her knees, and her daughter followed her example; but Georgie stood quietly by until their prayer was ended.

"You do not return thanks with us for this unqualified mercy?" said Lady Kinlock, reproachfully, as she resumed her seat.

"I have thanked Heaven already," replied Georgie, simply; "but you must remember I am not one of you. What right have I to join in your prayers?"

"You *are* one of us. You *shall* be!" returned the countess, as she folded her in her arms. "I have done you a wrong, my child. Let me repair it. Be my daughter from this day forward, and come back to Summerhayes with us!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"HAUNTED."

THE streets of London seemed to be filled by one word only, "Haunted." It glared at the passer-by in crown posters from every hoarding.

It was the first thing that attracted him on the knife-boards of the omnibuses. He could not walk into a public-house, nor enter a metropolitan train, without being met face to face by it.

He saw it painted in red, and blue, and green. Sometimes it was accompanied by a gaudy picture, and sometimes it stood alone.

Now he ran up against it in letters of six feet high, and then he found it stamped upon his pipe-light, until "Haunted" and the Royal Consort Theater were engraven on his mind.

Captain Legh could not fail to see it also, and the sight annoyed him beyond measure.

He had supposed, on his wife's own testimony, that she would return to America and trouble him no more.

Now she was coming to live, as it were, upon his very door-step, and to play where he could hear the echo of the plaudits she evoked.

He must either leave London, and the pleasures of the season behind him—a proceeding which would vastly interfere with his comfort—or be subject to the risk of meeting her any day in the streets, the park, or even at a social gathering.

He would be forced to listen to the raving of all the idiots who went to see her play. To be made the confidant, perhaps, of their hopeless admiration; or be subjected to the fire of their inquiries as to the reason of his separation from her. He felt that his position would be intolerable.

He either glared at the posters, as if the letters were burning into his soul, or hurried past them with an averted gaze, as though he would ignore the fact of their existence.

The word "Haunted" seemed to stare at him wherever he went. It followed him to his chambers; nor could he shake off the remembrance of it when he went to bed, until he began to think he was haunted in reality himself.

One day, as he was passing [a hoarding covered with the odious announcement from one end to the other, he happened to run up against Miss Sylvia Marchmont.

This young lady had dropped rather out of favor with Captain Legh lately.

He had begun to think she was very pert and forward, and would develop into being coarse and vulgar, and he had snubbed her occasionally in consequence.

Sylvia did not take a rebuff well. She was too silly to discern when she was corrected with judgment, and a caution usually urged her to do something worse. And if there was one thing Gerard Legh disliked about another, it was a want of refinement in a woman.

No beauty could atone for it in his eyes; he would have sickened of Venus herself had she been vulgar.

"Well," cried Miss Sylvia, who was clothed in sealskin and sable, and had a considerable greater quantity of bloom upon her face than was due to the frosty air, "*that's* large enough, isn't it?" pointing with her umbrella to the

poster. "Madame is determined we shall know she is come back again. I wonder why she's coming out at the Royal Consort. It doesn't look as if she had been such a *tremendous* success in the States, does it?"

Gerard Legh did not care to talk of his wife to Miss Marchmont, but he thought himself bound to refute her insinuation.

"You know that she *was*—as you term it—a tremendous success. And it is very natural she should not wish to miss a season in town. I suppose they give her large terms!"

"*Bouncers*, you may depend upon it. But it's little *you'll* see of it, my boy. By the way, I've just posted a letter to you! I've a crow to pluck with your wife, and I want to speak to you about it."

"Don't drag me into any of your feminine quarrels, for Heaven's sake, Sylvia! I tell you beforehand, that I shall refuse to interfere."

"Well, you'll have to listen, any way, and we can settle that afterward. She has written me a most impertinent letter."

"*Mrs. Legh* has written to you?" exclaimed Gerard in surprise.

"Yes! *Mrs. Legh* has written to me," echoed Sylvia, mimicking him. "Do you suppose I'm not good enough for your immaculate *Mrs. Legh* to write to? But she'll have to eat her words, or there will be a shindy."

"What on earth can she have had to say to *you*?" demanded Captain Legh.

He did not like the idea of any communication having passed between these two.

"Let us turn into the Burlington, and you shall read her letter. You must know," continued Sylvia, as they seated themselves at a table somewhat apart from the rest, "that hearing she was in London, I wrote to say I would go and see her. I thought it best to do so. We used to be pretty intimate at the Delphian, and I was afraid, if I held aloof, she might suspect something; and just read what the cat wrote to me in return."

"Before I read it," said Gerard, gravely, as he took the letter, "be good enough to understand, Sylvia, that I will not allow you to speak of my wife in such terms to me. You will please to remember *who she is*; and if you have occasion to mention her name, do it with respect."

"Oh! dear!" cried the girl, tossing her head; "well, she doesn't show much respect to *me*. And who is Miss Harrington, after all, that she should insult ladies as good as herself?"

"She is *my wife*," replied Captain Legh, quietly, as he opened the paper Sylvia had handed to him.

It contained but few words:

"MY DEAR MISS MARCHMONT,—I must request you will *not* call upon me. Your behavior during my absence in America is well known to me, and I have no desire to continue our acquaintance.

"Yours faithfully,

"GEORGINA HARRINGTON-LEGH."

When he had read this Captain Legh replaced the paper in the envelope, and returned it to its owner without a word.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GERARD LEGH AT THE LACYS'.

"WELL!" ejaculated Miss Marchmont, sharply.

"Well!" repeated Gerard Legh.

"Don't be so silly, echoing my words like a parrot. What do you mean to do about it?"

"What can I do about it? Mrs. Legh declines your acquaintance, and there is an end of the matter. Do you wish me to ask her to reconsider her determination?"

"I think, if you had the spirit of a mouse, you would take up the cudgels in my behalf, and call her to account for having written such words to me. They are most insulting; they call my character into question; you must see that."

"Oh! yes! I see that! But *my* attempting your defense would only make matters worse. Besides, there is one great obstacle against it, Sylvia; Mrs. Legh only speaks the truth."

At this Miss Marchmont had the grace to grow red.

"Well, you are not the one to say so, Captain Legh."

"I should not dream of saying it to any one but yourself. We have been talked about, and the fact has damaged both of us. I am sorry for it. But perhaps

there is not much harm done, and if we are more careful for the future—”

Sylvia tossed her head indignantly. She scented disappointment in the air.

“You’re *afraid*, I suppose,” she said, sarcastically. “You think she’d tell your papa and your mamma, and they’ll be down upon you.”

“You *know* it is not that, Sylvia! In the first place, Georgie doesn’t know my father and mother, and—”

“Don’t you try to humbug me!” interrupted Sylvia, “for *I* know all about it as well as you do. Charley Macfarren told me first, and then Lord Didswell. In fact Lord Didswell had just dined there.”

“Dined *where*?”

“At Summerley—or whatever the name of the place where your people live is.”

“But what has that to do with my wife?”

“Why, she’s staying with them—as if you didn’t know that—and they are all as thick as thieves together. Lord Didswell said your father and mother made no end of her; and she was peacocking about as if she’d lived there all her life.”

Captain Legh could not believe his ears. Georgie down at Summerhayes! It seemed impossible!

But if it were the case, he would not give Sylvia Marchmont the opportunity to let all London know that he only was not aware of it.

So, though he changed color visibly, he played with his walking-stick, and looked down, and refused to betray himself.

“I *knew* you knew it,” continued Sylvia, indignant at his silence. “And this is at the bottom of your tall talk to-day, is it? You think, now the earl and countess have taken her up, that you’ll go back again, like a good boy, and obey everything that’s said to you. Bah! I hate such twisting and turning!” she cried, as she rose, and shook out her skirts, and prepared to leave.

“The parson says we shouldn’t hate anything,” replied Gerard, in his provokingly languid fashion; “but you may be sure of one thing, Sylvia. Whatever course of action I may resolve on in the future can have no possible bearing on our relations to each other. We have always been good friends, and I hope we shall never be less. But

if our friendship has begun to be talked about, it is time it stopped."

"I'm sure *I* don't care if I never see you again!" exclaimed Sylvia, with a heated face. "And it will be most comical to think of you doing penance down at Summerhayes. I know you hate the place, and everything connected with it. I wonder how the earl and countess like the idea of 'Haunted'? Will the whole aristocratic family be seated in the front row of the stalls on the first night, do you think? or assisting to dress the leading lady behind the scenes? I almost wish I had taken an engagement at the Royal Consort now. I might have had one if I had chosen. It would have been as good as a play to see the new patrons of the drama settling down into their places."

"I think it is just as well you didn't. Good-bye, I shall see you to-morrow, I dare say, or next day," and, raising his hat, Captain Legh, to his immense relief, got rid of Sylvia Marchmont, and was free to pursue his way to the Lacys'.

He had not seen them, except when meeting by accident in the street, since they had left his house; but he could think of no one else likely to be able to give him reliable information of the doings of his wife.

To imagine Georgie at Summerhayes, in the bosom of his family, seemed incredible. The last he had heard of her was when she went down to Brighton, and he had refused to follow. How could she from that point have scored such a success as she appeared to have attained?

The Lacys were at home, however, and he had not long to wait before he was satisfied. He entered their room with a thousand apologies for not having called before. He had been busy—he had been ill—he had been away; in fact, he had been able (from his own showing) to do everything except find his way to George Street.

He was received, however, very graciously. The mother and daughter had not quite determined what position to assume toward him for the future.

They knew all about Georgie, for she had sent them voluminous descriptions of the flattering reception she had met with at Summerhayes; and they thought that, in case of its being followed by a reconciliation between the husband and wife, it would not do for them to have appeared unfriendly with Captain Legh. Georgie at Summerhayes

might mean an introduction for Marian there; and it would be awkward then to have openly snubbed the son of the house. So Miss Lacy kept her private grievance in her pocket when she came down to receive her visitor, and pretended there had never been any coolness between them.

"How are you, Marian?" said Gerard, shaking hands. "I have just heard the most extraordinary thing about my wife—that she is down at Summerhayes with my father and mother—and I have come straight to you for information. Is it true?"

"Yes, it is most certainly true. But don't you keep up any correspondence with your family?"

"Well, I never was a good correspondent, you know, and lately I have not written to them at all."

"Then you've not heard of your brother's accident?"

"No. What, poor old Moberley? What's happened to him?"

"He fell over a cliff in Brighton, and hurt his head. Georgie tells me she had made the acquaintance of Lord and Lady Moberley before that; but when the accident occurred the countess and Lady Hester Legh were there, and made friends with her over the affair—or rather, I believe they had made friends before they knew who she was. Any way, it is all right between them, and they have taken her and Sissy back to Summerhayes with them."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Gerard. "It is incredible to me!"

"I don't see anything extraordinary in their liking Georgie when they had once seen her. The extraordinary part was their never caring to make her acquaintance."

"Yes, yes; but their strong prejudices against the stage, and their taking her up just at the very time when she and I had separated. It seems as if they had done it on purpose to aggravate me."

"I don't know anything about your private affairs with your family. I can only repeat what my cousin has told me: she says they are kindness itself, and treat her just like a daughter."

"And yet she is to appear at the Royal Consort?"

"She can not throw up her engagement, I suppose, and she still has to live."

"Yes," said Captain Legh, with a deep sigh.

"And as for the separation, Gerard, it is entirely your

own fault; Georgie tells me you have distinctly refused her offer for a reconciliation."

"I know I have. There are reasons for my doing so which I can not explain to the world. You may remember what Mrs. Fletcher said in the letter you read me from New York, about her getting a divorce from me and marrying some confounded American?"

"You are not harping on that old story surely. She *didn't* get a divorce from you, and so you've nothing to complain of."

"But there are other things I have heard since, which I can not tell you. There is no doubt she doesn't care for me. Her heart is fixed elsewhere, and the more we keep apart the better."

"Why did she propose to return to you, then?"

"She had some ulterior motive I suppose. You women are full of tricks and deceptions. No man is sharp enough to fathom you, and I have no proclivity for being gulled."

"Just as your lordship pleases," said Marian, coolly. "I dare say Georgie is happier as she is. Your domestic life was not quite a little heaven upon earth, you may remember."

The allusion seemed to gall Captain Legh.

He rose quickly to take his leave.

"Well, thanks for your information. I am glad I came for it. I should not have cared to run down to Summerhayes in ignorance of whom I might meet there."

"You intend to run down, then?" said Marian, provokingly.

"I don't know *what* I intend to do!" replied Captain Legh, thoroughly out of temper as he left the house.

CHAPTER XL.

THE FIRST NIGHT.

ALTHOUGH Captain Legh had received a confirmation of the rumor concerning his wife he wandered about in a restless manner, unable to realize the turn in Fortune's wheel which had placed Georgie under the protection of his parents.

It seemed as if she had suddenly changed places with him, and, from being the suppliant, had assumed the posi-

tion of the injured party; and since Lord and Lady Kinklock had taken her up of course all the world would believe he was in the wrong. She would tell her version of the story, which, backed by beauty and fascinating manner, was bound to procure credence; and if he ever desired to be reinstated in her favor and receive the countenance of his own family he would have to sue for pardon on his knees.

It was not a pleasant predicament to be placed in, and Gerard Legh began to think he had behaved foolishly.

The first night for the production of "Haunted" was near at hand, and he was seized with a sudden desire to witness it. He thought he should like to see with his own eyes the change that he felt sure must have been effected in Georgie before she could have psychologized his parents to the extent of opening their arms to her.

He had not the courage to be seen about the theater itself, for fear of being recognized; but when the eventful evening had arrived, and the time of commencement was close at hand, he suddenly put on his great-coat, slouched his opera-hat over his eyes, and made his way to the Royal Consort.

The crowd was immense.

Outside, a long string of carriages blocked the way, and the police were keeping a space clear for the advent of royalty. Inside, well-dressed men and women were shoving and pushing each other as pertinaciously as their meaner brethren at the pit-door, and it was almost impossible to get near the box-office.

Captain Legh, dreading to make himself conspicuous, waited patiently until the majority had passed upstairs, and then, approaching the desk, laid his money down upon it.

"No stalls left, sir," said the box-keeper.

"Circle, then," replied Gerard, in a muffled voice.

But Mr. Abram, the acting-manager, was in superintendence, and recognized the tone at once.

"Very sorry, Captain Legh," he said, smiling, "but we have no boxes or stalls left. I wish you had let me know earlier, sir; but you can see the rush for yourself."

"Anything will do," replied Gerard, annoyed at the recognition.

"Dress-circle for Captain Legh," said the acting-mana-

ger to his subordinate; and then, thrusting the ticket through the pigeon-hole with the money that Gerard had placed on the desk, he continued: "So sorry we have nothing better, captain. You should have written to me before, sir;" and left Gerard to push his way upstairs, wondering how many people in the crowd had recognized that he was the husband of Georgie Harrington. He procured a seat quite at the back of the dress-circle, but he could see the stage from it, and that was all that he cared for.

The house was crammed from pit to gallery. The stalls held a long line of representatives of the press, with their note-books and pencils in hand; behind them might be seen some of the principal members of the theatrical profession. The boxes were filled with the leading men and women of fashion, and before the curtain drew up, the royal box was brightened with the presence of the prince and princess, who have done so much to encourage and patronize the drama of the present day. Large bouquets of flowers lying conspicuously in sight foretold the greeting that the favorite actress was to have on her return from America; and the appearance of the *chef d'orchestre*, with his gray kid gloves and his "button-hole," was the signal for a burst of prolonged acclamation that must have penetrated the walls of Georgie's dressing-room behind the scenes.

Captain Legh's eyes roved round the house in search of some familiar faces, and it was not long before he descried Lord Moberley and his wife in a stage-box, and Lord and Lady Henry Masham in one above it.

Lady Henry seemed in excellent spirits. She was dressed extravagantly for such an occasion, and was talking in the most animated manner with the gentlemen in her box. Gerard thought of the time when she had sat by his sick-bed, of the things she said then, and the sentiments she gave vent to, and wondered, with a sigh, how people could change so easily. Here was she, prepared apparently to do all the honor in the world to the woman she had so strongly condemned before him. And here was he, at the back of the dress-circle, in mortal terror lest anybody should recognize him; whilst she flaunted in one of the best boxes in the house, and did all she could to attract notice.

He could distinguish Marian Lacy and Louise Fletcher also, in different parts of the theater, and, never mind what opinions they had previously expressed about her, all

seemed possessed with but one idea, to render homage to the heroine of the evening. It was no wonder that the world seemed turned upside down in the eyes of Gerard Legh.

At last the curtain rose on the new piece, and all eyes were riveted upon the stage. The drama was translated from the French—*cela va sans dire*; but it had been constructed in its present form by two of our best dramatists, and its success was a predetermined thing. The main incidents hinged on the fact of a woman having *purposely* shot her husband instead of her lover, and gained all the sympathy for a virtuous action which she had never intended to do. But the knowledge of her crime haunted her so much through the new life which she commenced, that it was worthless to her, and she ended by destroying herself.

It was not a particularly wholesome play; but it afforded scope for an amount of powerful acting, which would show off Georgie Harrington's talents to the uttermost.

As the plot unraveled itself, the audience followed the story with breathless interest; but all their thoughts were diverted into one channel as the heroine stepped upon the stage.

A thundering burst of applause, which rang out again and again, told Gerard when she had appeared; but he shrunk back in his seat, and had not the courage to look at her. He had come there with the sole intent to gaze upon this altered being, who had so transformed her life and his own; and now he felt as if to look at her would be to part with some of the manhood on which he prided himself so highly. Little by little, however, he took heart of grace, and nerved himself for the effort.

As the acclamations of welcome at last died away, and he heard her sweet, sympathetic voice begin to speak, he roused himself, and bent eagerly forward. There she was, *his wife*, from whom he had been parted for eighteen months, standing quietly on the stage, and playing her part as if nowhere in the world was there any man whom she called "husband." Captain Legh's heart beat like a sledge-hammer as he regarded her.

She was dressed in a white satin robe, which clung in graceful folds. Her fair face looked fairer than ever to

him, under the gas-light, crowned with a pile of sunny hair, from which peeped every here and there a pearl.

When he had once looked at her he could not tear his eyes away, but kept them riveted on her till the curtain fell and shut her from his sight; then he rushed to the bar, and, quickly swallowing some brandy, resumed his seat.

He was dreadfully afraid of meeting any of his acquaintances. Something warned him that he could not have spoken of his wife just then. Criticism would have been out of the question with him, and to answer any inquiries torture.

He fancied he had caught sight of his old chum, Lord Frederic Carr, who had lately returned from America, in the crowd, and the idea had made him hurry back to his seat. But the second act commenced, and he could think of nothing but his wife.

"Did she think of him?" he wondered, as the play proceeded, and certain passages in it seemed to bear upon their mutual life. Could she speak such words and fail to remember the cruel disagreements that had cut their lives asunder?

When she addressed her husband in the melodrama, and warned him that anything of which she might be guilty in the future lay at his door, Captain Legh leaned back in his seat, and tried not to listen.

When she threw herself upon her lover's breast, and asked him to be kinder to her than the other had been, he shuddered and bit his lip.

At last he felt as if he could bear it no longer. The whole thing was torture to him; and, rising suddenly, he left the theater, and sought the open air.

The clear, cold night revived him; and, after awhile, he would have liked to return, but he was ashamed to do so. He would wait to hear the public verdict till to-morrow.

He went back to his chambers, and turned over the cards and notes upon his table.

There was an invitation from Lady Henry Masham amongst them, for a supper at her town-house that very evening.

Yesterday Captain Legh had scorned the idea. He did not care for supper and conversation at so late an hour, when every one was too tired to be witty. Besides, he was

a little out of conceit with Lady Henry. She was decidedly *passée*, and she had too many strings to her bow.

But to-night he thought differently. She would probably drag half the press critics home with her, and he should hear if the play was going to be a success or not, and what sort of a reception Georgie had at the close of it. Perhaps, also, he thought he might hear some more private news of her, for his ideas had been changing wonderfully since he had seen her again.

He had expected, somehow, to find her quite changed, whereas she had looked just the same as of yore, when she was his loving wife, and he had believed that nothing in this world could separate them. And the fact had brought back with it so much of the old feelings he held concerning her, that the hard crust of pride under which he had hidden his true sentiments was beginning to thaw beneath them.

But when he arrived at Lady Henry's house he found the crush was almost as great as it had been in the theater. It was a struggle to get into the hall, and quite an impossibility to mount the staircase.

Fragments of conversation reached him from every side, the chief of which naturally related to the event of the evening, and the unqualified success of "Haunted."

Every one seemed to agree that Georgie Harrington had increased in power since her visit to America, and that she had never been able to depict passion and pathos as she did now. No one had anything but praise to give her; but, strange to say, scarcely anybody seemed to recognize him as her husband.

A few men nodded to him from the crowd, and said:

"How are you, Legh? Congratulate you!" and disappeared again. But the majority talked before him as if he were not there.

It was not the first time he had had to swallow the bitter truth that he was nothing to the public without Georgie, and that when she was not present to shed the light of her popularity over him the public did not see he was there at all.

He was beginning to feel uncomfortable, not being quite sure what he might hear next, and to wonder how he could get to his hostess's side, when the crowd on the staircase parted with a murmur, and, coming down between their

ranks, Captain Legh beheld, to his consternation — *his wife!*

She was leaning on the arm of Lord Henry Masham, evidently on her way to the supper-room. She was robed in white satin, much the same as he had seen her in the theater, and she had pearls twisted in her hair. But she appeared very white and weary, and her eyes had a far-away look in them, as if she was not attending to what was said to her.

Gerard stood to one side with the rest to let them pass. He could not get away, for he was too much hemmed in on every side; but her close proximity made him tremble so that he had to grasp at the balustrade by which he stood.

“What would she do,” he thought, “when she perceived him? Would she start—or change color—or spring forward, unable to repress the emotion he would cause her? Would she make a scene before these strangers, or would a silent clasp of the hand tell him all was right between them?” He forgot (for the moment) that he had desired all communication should cease between them. He forgot that he had repudiated her offers of forgiveness, and fired on her flag of truce.

All he remembered was that his wife—the woman who of all the world belonged to him alone, was drawing nearer to him every moment—and that she could not fail to see and recognize him. She did not fail. As she was smilingly answering some remarks from Lord Henry Masham her eye fell upon Gerard standing at the foot of the stairs, and the smile faded from her lips as their eyes met.

But she did not speak. Her gaze rested on him for a moment, and then she turned her head away and swept past him out of sight. He had been cut by his own wife! At first he did not seem to realize the truth. Then he made a movement as though he would break through the crowd and get away. It was a difficult matter. Georgie and her cavalier had been succeeded by other couples, and the gangway was blocked. In his extremity, Captain Legh felt a tap upon his shoulder. He turned and saw the beaming face of Lord Frederic Carr.

“How are you, old fellow? Been wanting to look you up ever since I landed in England. Had such a jolly time out there. You don’t want to stop for this supper, do

you? Beastly crush. You'll never get in. Better come round to my rooms and have a B. and S."

"I will with pleasure," said Gerard Legh, delighted at the prospect of getting away. "It's an eternity since we met."

"I believe you, old boy. Lots of things to tell you too. Edge your way out of this as well as you can, and wait for me on the door-mat. I have a friend here and must look him up."

After some little difficulty Gerard Legh found his way to the front door. In a few minutes Lord Frederic joined him. He was accompanied by a tall, handsome man, of rather foreign appearance.

"Let's get out of this as soon as we can," said Lord Frederic, impatiently. "How people in their senses can get a rabble like this together and call it pleasure beats me altogether. Come on, Legh. My rooms are not two minutes' walk from here. They're small, but by Jove they are empty."

"By the way," he added, as he stood on his own doorstep, to let the two men pass in before him, "I have never introduced you to my friend. Captain Gerard Legh—Mr. Hiram Boch, of New York."

CHAPTER XLI.

A SURPRISE.

GERARD LEGH had not forgotten the name of Hiram Boch. Had it been less peculiar than it was, his jealous heart would have registered it with every word of Louise Fletcher's letter.

How often had he vowed, that if ever he came across the man who had attempted to undermine his peace, he would call him to account for the cowardly advantage he had taken of his absence!

But what we intend to do when the occasion is far off, and what we do when the occasion occurs, seldom agree with one another.

Not that such a feeling as fear ever crossed the mind of Captain Legh. He would have stood up against his adversary without a moment's hesitation, although he

possessed neither his strength nor build, had he been sure that he *was* his adversary.

But it was the instantaneous doubt that flashed before him that held him silent. The frank, ingenuous glance of Hiram Boch disarmed him.

It is true that, as he heard his name, Gerard Legh drew himself up stiffly against the wall of the entrance-hall, and returned his salutation with the slightest inclination of the head, and a stony stare that was intended to transfix him. But it lost its effect by Lord Frederic Carr hurrying both his friends up the stairs to his suite of rooms, and introducing them to a blazing fire, and every aid, in the shape of spirits and tobacco, to enjoying themselves.

“Now, boys!” he exclaimed cheerily, “sit down and make yourselves at home. Here are the cigars, Legh; they *ought* to be good; they are some of a case my father has just imported from Manilla. What will you drink, Boch? Help yourself, man, as quick as you can, and try and shake off the stagnating influence of that frightful ordeal termed society.”

Under cover of Lord Frederic's fire, the men he addressed had time to recover from the shock of meeting one another, and to resolve how they should act.

Gerard Legh came to the conclusion that he would do nothing—at least for the present.

One can scarcely rush at the throat of a guest under the roof-tree of the friend to whose hospitality one is indebted; and he determined he would wait and see what attitude the stranger assumed toward himself before he picked a quarrel with him.

After all, the rumor came in a woman's letter; and he had had reason of late to distrust the worth of a woman's word. He would not be friendly or familiar, but he would watch and wait.

Hiram Boch, on the other hand, had no intention of behaving otherwise than as a gentleman to Georgie Harrington's husband.

The meeting had not affected him in the same measure it did Captain Legh. He knew that Georgie had left America for love of this man, and had no idea but that they were living together at the present moment, as husband and wife should do.

It had been a bitter disappointment to him at the time,

but when he saw that to hope was not only useless, but wrong, he set himself to work like a brave, good man to root out the last remnant of his regret, and try to be happy in thinking she was so.

He had but just arrived in England; and he had anticipated, from the moment of landing, that he should meet Captain Legh, and have to be friendly with him for Georgie's sake. Now that he saw him he was rather agreeably surprised at his appearance. He had expected to see a big fellow, who had mastered his wife as much by strength of muscle as by force of will.

But Captain Gerard Legh was so essentially a man of fashion, with a delicate beauty, that made one think he could not raise his voice above the languid drawl in which he usually addressed his companions, that he knocked all Hiram Boch's preconceived notions of him on the head, and made him feel all the better inclined toward him.

The three men sat down together—Gerard Legh at a little distance from the others, and quite prepared to address his conversation entirely to Lord Frederic Carr.

“Well, old man!” exclaimed the latter, who usually dropped his conceit and became quite natural in the presence of his own sex, “and what have you been doing with yourself in my absence? Up to all kinds of mischief, I bet. I wish you'd have come out to the new world with me; you would have enjoyed yourself no end! My friend Boch and I only arrived at Liverpool this morning; just in time to see your wife's *début*. By George! wasn't she splendid? I expect you're uncommonly proud of her—ain't you now?”

“She is undoubtedly a very talented woman,” replied Captain Legh, with apparent indifference.

“You may well say so. You should have seen how she knocked them in California! The people went mad about her; didn't they, Boch?”

“I understood that they fully appreciated Miss Harrington's talent. But I was away in Chicago at the time, you may remember, Lord Frederic.”

“Oh! ah! so you were! Uncommonly stupid thing I did then, Legh. I suppose you know it is all due to me that you have your wife at home again. But they were riled about it, weren't they, Boch? I thought old Maxim would have cut my throat! Though I suppose I only has-

tened matters; she would have heard of it, sooner or later. You're all right again now, though, old fellow, I suppose, aren't you?"

"I am all in the dark as to what you are talking about," replied Legh.

"Why, of your illness. My sister, Mrs. Raynor, wrote me the news when I was in San Francisco; and I went to the theater the same night, and thoughtlessly mentioned it to your wife, thinking, of course, she had heard it also. But the upshot was I frightened her so that she chucked up her engagement. She had to pay no end of money as forfeit, hadn't she, Boch?"

"Sixteen thousand dollars," said Hiram Boch, quietly.

"But she *would* do it, you know, and rush back to England to nurse you. By George! you ought to feel flattered, old man, at a lovely woman like that throwing her money to the winds in order to turn into your sick-nurse! But I don't think you're looking well yet, Legh. You're very thin, now I come to examine you, and your eyes are heavy. Are you feeling quite strong again?"

"I'm not quite myself yet; but I dare say I shall be soon. I had a nasty time of it; and the weather is against me."

"And were you convalescent by the time Miss Harrington reached you?"

"Oh, yes, I was up again when she landed in England."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it, for she suffered terribly when she heard the news. I thought she would have gone out of her mind. Boch can tell you all about it, for he accompanied her to New York, and saw her on board the steamer; didn't you, Boch?"

"I had that honor," said Hiram Boch.

He had hardly spoken before; but now he seemed almost anxious to join in the conversation. He was desirous to place himself on his proper footing with Georgie Harrington's husband.

"I believe I have heard your name mentioned before in connection with that of my wife," observed Gerard Legh, stiffly.

"Have you? I feel flattered it should be so. I had the pleasure of Miss Harrington's acquaintance in New York, and I met her also for a short time in California; and when I found she was returning to the city I was proud to be

able to offer her my escort. But she was in terrible distress, as Lord Frederic says. I could do nothing for her but see to her baggage and deliver her into the hands of her friend Mrs. Lousada-Lorens. I trust that she is well?"

"You have seen her," said Captain Legh, "and you can judge for yourself!"

"I saw her on the stage—yes, from the furthest corner of the pit, which was the only part of the house where we could find standing room; but I was scarcely in a position to judge of her appearance. And afterward, at Lady Henry Masham's, where Lord Frederic was good enough to take me, she was so surrounded by her friends that I would not have presumed to have intruded myself upon her notice. But you will present her, I hope, with my kind regards and congratulations on the success of the new drama; and my love to my little sweetheart Sissy, whom I sincerely hope to have the pleasure some day of seeing again."

"I believe you have a sinister design on that young lady, Boch!" exclaimed Lord Frederic Carr, "and that at some future time we shall hear of your carrying her back to New York to help you to scatter those dollars, of which you have so many more than you know what to do with!"

"I could wish no better fate," replied Mr. Boch, laughing, "if only Miss Sissy will wait for me. She is a most charming little girl; and we were the best of friends. I think she carried a lock of my hair back to England with her."

"I am surprised you have not seen Mrs. Legh yet," remarked Gerard, grimly, "as of course she is aware that you have come to England!"

Hiram Boch shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know how she should have heard it, Captain Legh. I have been in the habit for many years past of spending the season in London, as perhaps, if she has ever done me the honor to mention my name, your wife may have told you; but I crossed earlier this spring, simply because my friend Lord Frederic wished for my company. I am going over to Paris to-morrow to pass a month or two with some of my relations there. I should have liked to see Mrs. Legh *en route*; but I am afraid she will not be sufficiently recovered from her fatigue of to-night. Therefore I

must ask you to convey my best wishes to her, and a promise of caramels to Miss Sissy until my return."

Gerard Legh was staggered. This perfect composure and conveyance of every-day messages to Georgie, through himself, was not at all like the behavior of an illicit lover on finding himself unexpectedly in the presence of the injured husband; it was so undisguisedly friendly, and nothing more, that it took him aback, and he did not know what to answer.

Mr. Boch, too, evidently imagined he was living with his wife, and the position was awkward in the extreme. He neither knew whether to acquiesce in his desires, or to deny that he had the power of complying with them. And as soon as Mr. Boch ceased Lord Frederic took up the ball.

"Where are you living now, Legh? in the same house in Blue Street?"

"No, I let it during my wife's absence, and the term is not up yet."

"What a nuisance! You're at Morley's then, I suppose? Well, I want to look you up to-morrow about a little matter of business. What time shall I drop in?"

"If you want to see me you mustn't go to Morley's," replied Gerard Legh, with a short laugh. "That's where my wife is staying. I live in chambers in Rochester Street, and you'll always find me in until two or three o'clock."

"Oh!" said Lord Frederic, significantly; and Gerard felt, rather than saw, that both the men were regarding him with surprise.

"It's no use beating about the bush," he continued, rather fiercely, for he believed that the statement he was about to make would lead up to the quarrel with Hiram Boch that he had been anticipating. "The fact is, my wife and I quarreled before she went to America, and we've not made it up since, and I don't suppose we ever shall. She made some friends out there, whom she prefers to myself; and she may go back to them if she chooses, for I've done with her, once and forever!"

"I don't believe it's true," said Lord Frederic.

"And I *know* it's not true!" exclaimed Hiram Boch, striking his hand on the table.

"And pray, sir, what right have *you* to stand up for my wife in any way?" cried Gerard Legh, rising to his feet.

"The right of friendship, Captain Legh, and of knowl-

edge. I had the honor of Miss Harrington's acquaintance very shortly after she landed in my country, and I watched her career all through. A lady filling so admired and exalted a position as she did could not have done a single thing unknown to the public. She was gracious and sweet to all, as it seems her nature to be; but she favored none, and all America knows it. If any of your friends have told you to the contrary, sir, they are false friends, who wish to injure you. There was but one person of whom your wife thought whilst in America, and that was—*yourself!*”

“I am much obliged to you,” said Gerard Legh, snorting and trembling, and looking anything but obliged as he sat down in his chair again.

“Come, come, my dear Boch, that's enough!” interposed Lord Frederic, dreading a quarrel between the visitors.

“If you think so I will say no more,” returned Hiram Boch; “but I could hardly say less of a lady who commanded as much respect as admiration from my country-people. But if I have offended Captain Legh, I ask his pardon.”

“You have not offended me,” said Gerard, in a low voice, as he resumed his cigar. On which their host plied them with spirits and water and small talk, after the fashion of Englishmen, in hopes that a judicious diversion might revive the friendly feeling with which they had commenced the evening. But his kindly efforts fell flat. Neither Mr. Boch nor Captain Legh could be induced to talk much, and after a quiet half hour they rose to leave.

Lord Frederic accompanied them to the front door, anxious to see them go on their different ways in peace. He was in consequence surprised and a little alarmed to see Captain Legh halt on the pavement and raise his hat, and to hear him say:

“Mr. Boch, if you have no objection I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with you. My chambers are close at hand. If you will accompany me there, I can say what I have to say to you in private.”

“My dear fellow,” exclaimed Lord Frederic, earnestly, “don't have any row, I implore you, for Heaven's sake! Mr. Boch is my friend, and a visitor on our shores. If you fancy you have the slightest pretext for picking a

quarrel with him, let me be the medium through whom your grievance is stated!"

"I have no desire to quarrel with Mr. Boch," replied Captain Legh, "and if I mistake not he has no more need of your championship or interference than I have, though I know you mean it kindly. I only wish to ask him a few questions. It is for him to say whether he will answer them or not."

Hiram Boch drew himself up to his full height.

"I am quite ready to answer anything you may wish to ask me, Captain Legh; and I will do so here, or in your chambers, or wherever you may fix the place of meeting!"

"We will go to my chambers," replied Gerard Legh, briefly, as he hailed a passing hansom.

The two men got in, and drove away together, leaving Lord Frederic Carr upon the pavement, staring after them, and anathematizing the unlucky star that had induced him to bring them together; for he fully believed that some great misfortune would accrue from that day's meeting.

CHAPTER XLII.

AN EXPLANATION.

THE occupants of the hansom did not exchange a single word until they found themselves in Captain Legh's drawing-room. Then Gerard turned up the gas, motioned his guest to a seat, and took one opposite to him.

"Mr. Boch," he commenced, gravely, "this proceeding on my part may appear rather strange to you, but I have something of importance to ask you which I could not have done in the presence of a third man. You appeared surprised just now to hear that I was not living with my wife. Do you mean me to understand that you have no idea why there should be a coolness between Mrs. Legh and myself?"

"I have not the least idea," replied Hiram Boch. "I will not deny that, in consequence of your not accompanying her to the States, a rumor got abroad that you were not on the best of terms. But when I saw the extreme distress into which the news of your illness threw her, and the sacrifices she made to rejoin you, I had no doubt whatever that her devotion would be requited by your gratitude."

"It might have been," said Gerard, "but for one obstacle."

"And that was—"

"*Yourself!*"

Hiram Boch sprung from his seat.

"I am the cause of your separation? What do you mean? In what way have I come between you?"

"If you will reseate yourself I will tell you," rejoined Captain Legh. "I mentioned this evening that I had already heard your name in connection with that of my wife. It came to me in a letter from New York, written by a mutual friend, in which she said that you were known throughout the city as an admirer of Mrs. Legh, and that it was reported that she intended suing me for a divorce on the plea of non-support, in order that she might marry you."

Hiram Boch grew scarlet, but stood firmly to his colors.

"It was false!" he answered.

"I believe it to have been so *now*, or you and I would not be sitting here together," continued Legh. "But I should like to know how it originated. There is seldom smoke without fire, and this fire, however small, threatens to reduce my household gods to ashes. When Mrs. Legh returned home and offered to rejoin me, this wretched story was rankling in my breast and I refused to see her, so the distance between us is wider than it ever was before. Some men, perhaps, on meeting with the person who was supposed to have done them so great a wrong, would have created a scandal on the strength of the report. I have too much respect for myself to do so. Words you have let fall to-night make me think it may all be a mistake, and I appeal to you as a gentleman to tell me if it is so. If I am wrong—if you have dared to address words to my wife that you had no right to say, nor she to listen to—then the law may decide the matter between us. If it would be beneath my dignity to quarrel with you unnecessarily, it would be still more so to make a common broil of an insult which nothing but blood could satisfactorily wipe out. I am waiting for your explanation. The sooner you can give it me the better." And Gerard Legh leaned back in his chair and folded his arms.

Hiram Boch struggled with his feelings for a moment, and then replied:

“You have treated me like a gentleman, Captain Legh, and I will treat you in the same way. Your informant told you I was an admirer of Mrs. Legh’s. She was right. I was her admirer, and I am so still. But I am nothing more, and for a very good reason, that she never would have permitted me to be so. The mistake arose in this manner. Your wife came out to New York as Miss Harrington. No one knew that she was a married woman. There was no husband visible, and she never mentioned one. When I saw how sweet and lovable she was (and no man can help seeing that), I ventured to tell her so, and she put me in my place at once. She told me of her marriage and the circumstances under which she had come to America. She thought she owed it me for having permitted me to fall into such an error. And from that hour I never dared to address her in such language again. So far I fail to see where I have done wrong.”

“I fail to see it also,” replied Gerard Legh. “But what was this story of a divorce?”

“When her friends saw that Miss Harrington was very unhappy, and unlikely to become less so, they urged her to take steps to set herself free. Divorces are more easily obtained in our country than in yours, Captain Legh, and the lady she lived with in New York had passed through the ordeal successfully, and was most desirous that Miss Harrington should avail herself of the same means to obtain her liberty.”

“And *you*, I conclude, had no wishes on the subject,” observed Gerard, sarcastically.

“Pardon me, sir, I promised to tell you the truth, and I will. Had Miss Harrington obtained a divorce from you I should have been the first to lay my fortune at her feet. But the importance of the question lies with *her*, not with myself; and the fact remains that she did *not* obtain a divorce, and never even attempted to procure one. On the contrary, as soon as she heard that you were lying ill, all her anxiety was to rush to your assistance. She resigned the most brilliant prospects an actress ever had to return to England. She paid an exorbitant forfeit to get off her engagement; and I may say that every humble effort I could make to expedite her departure I made. I admired her so much—as a woman as well as an artist—that I was proud to help her to do what she considered to be her duty.

And in like manner, if it were in my power to bring you together again to-morrow I would. Do you believe me?"

"I do believe you," said Captain Legh, holding out his hand, which the other grasped firmly. "You have lifted a load from my mind, and I thank you for it. Help yourself," he continued, his native hospitality immediately in the ascendant, as he pushed the spirit-case toward his companion, "and I will tell you, as well as I am able, the part I have taken in our separation. They told me she was going to sue me for a divorce on the plea of non-support. Well, I never have supported her. I acknowledge it; but I never saw my behavior in that respect in its true colors till lately. I was an idle sort of fellow when I married her. I always had been, and I did not consider the responsibilities marriage would bring me. She always made lots of money, and she seemed to enjoy her profession so much, and the cash came pouring in with so little trouble, that I never saw the necessity of my doing any work. But we are both high-tempered—myself particularly so—and when quarrels arose between us it always harked back to the old grievance of my idleness, till I grew tired of it, and our differences became serious. But through it all I cared for her—Heaven only knows how much I cared for her!" said Gerard Legh, suddenly breaking down, "and I found it out after she was gone, and I felt what my life was without her; but we were both too proud to make it up—until she came back to me, poor girl—and by that time this wretched story had made me believe her letters were all humbug, and she had some ulterior motive for wishing to live with me again. I see now that I've been wrong all through. I'm beastly jealous of her, and it has been a stumbling-block in my way from the beginning. And now I've hashed my goose altogether, and I don't suppose we shall meet again this side the grave!"

"Oh! nonsense," cried Hiram Boch, cheerily; "why, it only wants a word of kindness to make it all right again between you. She told me in California—she had no one else to confide in, poor soul!—that you were the only man that she had cared for in her life. She was in a fever of excitement and anxiety to get to your side. It must have been a terrible disappointment to her to find she had taken all her trouble for nothing."

"Well, she has consoled herself, at all events," replied

Legh. "My father and mother have taken her up, and installed her in state at Summerhayes. They have quarreled with me for years because I married an actress; but directly we are separated they receive her as a daughter, and leave me out in the cold. I dare say if Mrs. Legh had her choice now, between giving up the patronage of the Earl and Countess of Kinlock and any further claim on her good-for-nothing husband, that it would not take her long to decide."

"I dare say not, though I think her decision would refute your insinuation. But has it never struck you, Captain Legh, that the fact of Lord and Lady Kinlock having chosen this juncture to invite your wife to Summerhayes is the best proof you can have that *they* consider her to be blameless in the matter?"

"Oh, they know nothing," returned Gerard, testily. "I believe they have done it simply to annoy me, because I have not paid them so much attention since her departure. Any way, she has the *entrée* there, and the mere fact is sufficient to widen the breach between us."

"I am very, *very* sorry," said Mr. Boch. "Of course, as a stranger, it would be impertinent in me to make a suggestion; but I repeat, that if there is any way in which I could help to make things straight between you, I would spend half my fortune to accomplish it."

"You are very good, but there *is* no way!" replied Gerard, curtly.

"You made an observation just now, Captain Legh, in speaking of the past, which leads me to suppose you regret not having been brought up to look at life from a more serious point of view."

"Yes; I do regret it! I have thrown away every opportunity I had, without thinking of the consequences it entailed on me. I see now that it is a man's proper place to work, especially when he has a wife like mine. But it is too late to think of it."

"What is your notion of *too late*? You can not be over thirty."

"I am just thirty."

"And there must be hundreds of places open to you."

"Not in this country. You know how much we think of rank and position here. I should lower my name by accepting anything that did not accord with my birth. And

as for secretaryships and governorships, and all those sorts of billets, I have tried for them dozens of times, but they have hundreds of candidates for every vacancy."

"I suppose so. Yet, if I should hear of such a thing as a vacant consulate, or any appointment suitable to your position, may I mention your name?"

"*You!* Are you likely to hear of such?"

"As likely as most of your friends, I fancy," replied Hiram Boch, smiling. "You must not regard me as quite a newly caught specimen of the Transatlantic aborigine. I have lived almost more abroad than in my own country; and am as familiar with London, Paris, and Berlin, as with New York. I have very influential acquaintances also, amongst both the English and foreign nobility. It gives me no pride to say this, because I am perfectly aware that the circumstance is due more to the miserable incumbrance of wealth that hangs about me than to myself. Yet it gives me influence, and an occasional opportunity to serve my friends; and if I can serve *you*, I am at your command."

"I thank you," repeated Gerard Legh; "and the best proof I can give you that I believe every word you have told me is true, lies in the fact that I should feel no humiliation in accepting a favor at your hands. Yes; if I could get work to do I should be very thankful. It would at least show Georgie that, whatever happens in the future, I shall never live upon her earnings again."

"Then I will bid you good-night and good-bye," said Hiram Boch, rising from his chair. "I start for Paris to-morrow, and I may be absent until the commencement of the season. But I hope we shall meet again."

"I hope so sincerely," responded Captain Legh. "It is wonderful how this little explanation has changed my mind about you, Boch. I feel now as if I were parting from a friend."

"I *am* your friend. Let me think that you are mine," said Mr. Boch, with a farewell clasp of the hand.

When he was gone, Gerard sat for some time with his pipe in his mouth, thinking over the interview that had just passed between them.

He admired the frank manliness with which Hiram Boch had related the part he had taken in trying to shield Georgie against himself, and the generosity with which he had defended her character from the slightest touch of blame.

It gave him a thrill of pleasure to remember that his wife had repulsed the advances of such a man as this, and preferred *his* sick-bed to all the admiration, excitement, and gain she had left behind her.

He wondered if Boch's prophecy of renewed happiness between them could ever really come true; and that he should hold his dear girl in his arms again, and hear her say she loved him above all the world.

But then he remembered, with a shudder, that only that very evening she had *cut him dead*, and left him standing at the foot of the stairs, with a sickening sensation of disappointment and shame.

The recollection put all his pleasant dreams to flight, and tossing off the remainder of his brandy and water, he turned to the pile of letters lying on his table for some distraction from his thoughts.

The first one he took up was from his father. He knew the coat-of-arms and the old-fashioned red seal too well to be mistaken. But he was anything but prepared for the contents:

“MY DEAR GERARD,—I dare say you have already heard that for the last month your wife has been staying with us at Summerhayes.

“Your mother and sister, Hester, made her acquaintance at Brighton, under very trying circumstances, when we almost despaired of the life of dear Moberley; and were so charmed by the courage, and intelligence, and womanly feeling she displayed on that occasion, that any little prejudices they may have formerly entertained against her profession completely melted away in the affection they could not help entertaining for herself—an affection which, I may say, has grown daily by an intercourse with her since.

“She made friends with everybody whilst she stayed at Summerhayes; and though we regret that previous arrangements have compelled her to leave us for the present, we hope, before long, to have her with us again.

“She has behaved like a real daughter to me, and so wound herself round my heart, that I feel the liveliest interest in all that concerns her.

“At my earnest request she confided to me the whole history of her married life with you, and I can not help feeling that you have treated her with unparalleled cruelty

and ingratitude. You have let this tender creature work for you in sickness and health, and not even had the grace to acknowledge what you owed to her. You drove her from England by your unkindness; and when she offered to return to you (which was much more than you deserved), you refused to receive her in terms of insult.

“Georgie has appealed to me, as a father, for assistance, and I intend to help her, as if she were my own child.

“I can not make you do your duty in cherishing and supporting her, but I can at least protect her against being troubled by any claims from you in the future. From your behavior to her, and from the manner in which you have conducted yourself during her absence (and of which I, unfortunately, heard too much), it is evident to me that you can not care for her any longer, and Georgie is of the same opinion.

“Under these circumstances, I have advised her to appeal to you, through her solicitors, for a separation by mutual consent.

“She has placed the particulars of the case in the hands of her old friend Mr. Harman, and I suppose Jolliffe will act for you. Under ordinary circumstances, you would be, of course, called upon to make your wife an allowance, but in the present instance she will not hear of it. Neither can it be necessary, as I shall make her future my care, were it only to try and repair the great injury you have done her!

“I conclude that Harman will communicate with Jolliffe, and let you know when the preliminaries are ready.

“You will be obliged to meet the poor child once more in order to sign the papers; but I shall be there to protect her from receiving any further insult at your hands. And it will depend upon how you bridle your tongue, when speaking of her in the future, whether you ever receive any further countenance or support from your father.

“KINLOCK.”

“This is a pleasant sort of communication to receive at three o'clock in the morning,” soliloquized Captain Legh, with a ghastly attempt at merriment, as he finished the letter. “I am to be cut off with a shilling by my father—shut out of my house—ignored by my family—separated forever from my wife—”

But here the picture he was drawing for himself proved

too much for him. Gerard could proceed no further. The fall from his bright illusions to this depth of loneliness was too precipitate. There was no one to see him: he flung his arms out over the table, and buried his face upon them, and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A DISCOVERY.

As soon as the Ladies Legh had received the sanction of their parents to an intimacy with Georgie Harrington, they derived the utmost pleasure from her society.

It was nothing new to Georgie to find herself amongst ladies and gentlemen; she had been used to such association all her life, and never been persuaded to sink beneath it. If anything, the Earl and Countess of Kinlock, and the Ladies Hester and Alice Legh, notwithstanding their noble blood, were not up to the mark of her own friends.

There was nothing objectionable in them, but there was certainly nothing to be desired. They were old-fashioned and dowdy in their manners and ideas, and they had very mediocre abilities.

Lady Kinlock and her elder daughter had no ambition beyond attending to their Bible-classes and their poor, and the earl was simply a gentleman-farmer, who walked about his house half the year round in muddy boots and splashed gaiters.

Lady Alice was the only one of the Summerhayes party who had the power to interest Georgie, though she was grateful to them all for their kindness to her. And the ice with which they had enveloped themselves having melted away, it really seemed as though they could not do enough to repair their past neglect.

Lady Kinlock, in particular, whose maternal heart still beat more warmly for her recreant Gerard than for any of her other children, and who perceived at once how firmly her daughter-in-law's affections were fixed in the same direction, treated Georgie more like a spoiled child of the house than a visitor. And to the Ladies Legh their new visitor was a revelation. They had never been brought in contact with any one so lovely, so *spirituelle*, and so marvelously well dressed before.

They were never tired of admiring Georgie's voice and gestures, or of hearing her relate some laughable adventure she had gone through. They questioned her with such ardent curiosity respecting her theatrical career that she was amused beyond measure sometimes over the ludicrous mistakes they made.

"What did you expect to find me like?" she asked, one day. "Did you think I danced outside a booth, dressed in short skirts and tinsel, and banging a tambourine? You have the funniest ideas, Alice, of theatrical life that I ever heard."

"But consider, dear Georgie, that we have never been allowed to go inside a theater, so of course we have seen no actresses. When I heard you were coming home from Brighton with papa and mamma, I did not know what to expect; and when I saw you enter the room I could not believe my eyes. Oh, you are so much nicer, and cleverer, and more beautiful than any of our other friends! I used to think Helen quite a fashionable beauty, but she is nothing beside you. How I wish you were going to stay here always. I shall never be able to do without you again."

"You silly girl!" said Georgie. But she understood her all the same.

She knew what it was to have entered the charmed circle of Bohemia, where the wine does not sparkle more brightly than the wit, nor the diamonds than the eyes, and to feel that everything that came after it in the dull routine of fashionable society was "flat, stale, and unprofitable."

Lady Kinlock, on the other hand, questioned her daughter-in-law closely about her husband; but on this point she found Georgie unusually reticent.

She would relate none of the quarrels of her married life; all she would admit was, that Gerard had ceased to care for her, and therefore it was better they should be apart.

"But you love him still, my dear girl; I feel sure of that," said Lady Kinlock; "and it would be far more respectable for you to be living together as you used to do."

"I can not agree with you, Lady Kinlock. I consider it the most dreadful fate to have to live with a man who does not care for you, and that is the state to which our social differences have reduced Gerard. Depend upon it he is happier by himself."

"When I remember how he quarreled with us all for

your sake," replied the countess, "I can not understand his present conduct. He was always wayward and hard to manage, but now he is incomprehensible. I used to think he worshiped the ground you trod on."

"So he may have done," exclaimed Georgie, with an attempt at cheerfulness; "but that sort of thing doesn't last long as a rule. You see he is tired of worshiping—at least, at *my* feet."

"Oh, my dear, don't make such a terrible insinuation as that! Whatever his faults may be, it is quite impossible that *my* son could be guilty of behaving in such a manner. A married man, too! You shock me beyond measure!"

"Mamma," said Lady Alice, suddenly entering the room, "Lady Henry Masham is in the drawing-room. She has come to see Georgie."

"I don't want to see her!" exclaimed Georgie.

"Why not, my dear? Is she not an old acquaintance of yours?"

"She is. Lady Henry has received every favor at my hands that she could possibly extract from them. She has accepted my services and made use of my influence—groveled to me in every way, in fact, that could save her a penny; but I have been in England three months, and this is the first time she has called on me. So it would seem that her visit is paid more to Summerhayes than to myself."

"You shall do just as you like, Georgie; I will use no coercion. But I think I must see her myself, for I believe she nursed poor Gerard through the typhoid fever."

"Ah, I forgot that!" said Georgie, with a sudden pang. "Yes, we owe her our thanks, if nothing more. I will accompany you, Lady Kinlock."

It was a strange sight to Lady Henry Masham to see those two entering the drawing-room together.

Georgie Harrington, with her *svelte* figure, fashionable *coiffure*, and mouse-colored velvet dress, made in the height of the fashion; and Lady Kinlock, in her prim black silk and worked muslin collar and cuffs, like a housekeeper of the last century.

She had not made up her mind about calling on Georgie until she heard she was staying at Summerhayes.

Captain Legh had not proved so grateful as she had expected for the attentions she had shown him during his ill-

ness; still, she did not want to offend him until she knew Miss Harrington's plans. But now she had been received by the Earl and Countess of Kinlock, Lady Henry told herself she had but one course to pursue. It was her duty to extend a patronizing hand to her once more.

Not that Georgie seemed much in need of patronage. She was as familiar with the countess as if she had been brought up by her side, and, stranger still, the countess was quite as familiar with her.

Lady Henry opened the ball with a tirade of excuses for not having been able to call on Georgie before, but the weather had been so unfavorable, and she was not well, and her house was full of guests, and she had not a moment to call her own.

Georgie cut her very short.

"There is no need of any apology, Lady Henry. Indeed your visit is very well timed, as we only returned last week from Brighton, where we were detained by Lord Moberley's accident."

"Ah, I heard of that. What a shock it must have been to you all! I hope you were not present, Lady Kinlock?"

"I was indeed. And if it had not been for the courage and presence of mind of this dear girl, I don't know what any of us would have done. Talking of Moberley's illness, however, reminds me of your kindness to my other son, Lady Henry, for which both Mrs. Legh and I return you our best thanks."

"It was very good of you," chimed in Georgie. "I can't think what poor Gerard would have done at such a time if he had not been amongst friends."

"It was nothing. I was very glad to be of use," replied Lady Henry. But the coolness with which the remark was made puzzled her.

Were the husband and wife reconciled? Had they been brought together again by the intervention of the father-and mother-in-law? She could not ask, but she did her best to find out.

"I hope Captain Legh has perfectly recovered from the attack. Is he at Summerhayes?"

"No. He is in London," replied Georgie.

Lady Henry was again at a loss.

"I was afraid this cold weather would be against him,"

she continued. "I thought him looking very ill last time I saw him."

"When was that?" asked Georgie.

"Oh, a long time ago. I have been quite shut up at Hatleigh lately. Let me see. We met at the Promenade Concerts on the Antoinette Sterling night, the last day of November, of course—the thirtieth."

Georgie started. She had that date written down in her pocket-book—the date on which Gerard had been told by some malicious person that she had gone to Richmond with Brabazon Chauncey. Could it have been Lady Henry Masham? She became all eagerness to ascertain.

"At the Promenade Concerts!" she repeated. "I was not aware Gerard had been there."

"Oh, yes, he was—innocently enjoying himself, you know. And I'll tell you who was there too. A person I most particularly dislike, although she is a friend of yours, Miss Harrington—Mrs. Fletcher. She had a box next mine, and when she heard Captain Legh's voice she positively pushed herself into our company and monopolized him the entire evening. I wonder you can cultivate such people, my dear. To me she is most obnoxious in every way."

"I don't think I shall cultivate her long," said Georgie. "Did she appear friendly with Gerard, Lady Henry?"

"I should think she did—*more* than friendly. She was positively affectionate! I got rather sick of it, and I fancy Captain Legh did also, for he left us long before the concert was over. Oh, she is a very objectionable person, and I mean to drop her acquaintance altogether."

Then Lady Henry became effusive and confidential. There were other people in the room, and she was able to lower her voice as she spoke to Georgie.

"Well, dear, and so you are really home again. We heard all about your triumphs in America of course. What a pleasure and surprise to meet you *here*! But it is only what it ought to be."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Georgie; "and I have only one regret that I did not know them all sooner. They are so good and kind to me!"

"And so they ought to be. I suppose you will give up the stage now?"

"Indeed I have no such intention. On the contrary, I appear at the Royal Consort next week."

"I saw the announcement, but fancied the engagement would be canceled, Lord and Lady Kinlock being so strongly prejudiced against the profession."

"They do not like it, but they see the necessity of my pursuing it. What else have we to live on? You know that the Kinlocks are not rich enough to pension us off."

"And Captain Legh has not yet found anything to do, then?" said Lady Henry, sympathetically.

"I did not know he was on the lookout for it!"

"Oh, yes! He consulted Lord Henry on the subject more than once. But it is so difficult to find work for a gentleman!"

"Lady Henry," said Georgie, suddenly, "don't think I ask from idle curiosity, but *did* you hear what Louise Fletcher was talking to my husband about on the night of the Promenade Concerts?"

"I can't repeat the words, my dear, but it was all about *you*. I am sure of that, for I heard the name of Mr. Brabazon Chauncey (isn't he your agent?) more than once. I don't think Mrs. Fletcher is much of a friend of yours, Miss Harrington."

"I don't think she is," said Georgie, quietly.

But as soon as the visitor had taken her leave she told Lady Kinlock she had some business that would take her up to town at once.

"Not to-night, Georgie, surely?" exclaimed her mother-in-law. "It is nearly four o'clock; you can not be home again till after dark."

"Never mind, dear Lady Kinlock, I will sleep at my aunt's. But I have heard something that requires my attention at once, and I must go up to-night."

Lady Kinlock—not without bewailing the fact of her having to leave them, and insisting upon her being accompanied by Rachel—ordered the carriage to convey her to the station; and in a couple of hours she was standing in the presence of Louise Fletcher. Mrs. Fletcher had removed from Morley's to some less expensive domicile, and she professed to be delighted to see her dear Georgie again.

"This *is* a surprise, darling," she exclaimed, as she flew to meet her; "I was afraid your grand friends would make you forget all about poor me. But I ought to have known you better! Oh! I *am* pleased to see you again."

She would have embraced her, but Georgie put her back.

"Stop, Louise," she said. "Before I kiss you I would like to ask you a question. You were at the Promenade Concerts on the thirtieth of last November, and you met my husband there. What did you say to him?"

Louise Fletcher grew white through her rouge.

"*What did I say to him, dear?* Why, how can I remember at this distance of time? I *did* meet him, I think, in Lady Henry Masham's box; but we scarcely exchanged two words. It is not likely I should be more than civil to the creature."

"Try and think," replied Georgie; "I have Lady Henry's testimony that you said more than two words to him, and my husband's as to the subject of your conversation."

"If that is the case, why should you want mine?" demanded Louise, boldly.

"Because, if what I suspect is true, all intimacy must cease between us, and I am loath to break the friendship of years without good reason. Shall I jog your memory for you, Louise? You told Gerard on that occasion that I had driven about London with Brabazon Chauncey, and gone down to Richmond with him."

"I did not say so. I said he *asked* you, and you would have liked to go."

"That is enough. You have confessed it was the topic of your conversation with him."

"Why should it not be? I said nothing but the truth. You did drive with Mr. Chauncey."

"I did. You knew on what occasion and for what distance. You knew, also, that I purposely avoided going down to Richmond for fear my husband might not like it. You saw my tears—my self-abasement. You were witness to my agony at our estrangement; to my joy at the prospect of our reconciliation; and yet you could tell him—on that very night when he had made up his mind to join me again—a story which you *knew* would uproot all his good resolutions—which has, perhaps, parted us forever. Louise, when I received his letter to say what he had heard, but not from whom he had heard it, I registered a vow that if it took me to the last day of my life I would find out the person who had done me that wrong, and erase his name from the number of my friends. And now I find that it was *you*."

She paused for a reply, but none came. Mrs. Fletcher was too much ashamed to speak.

"I have not been so bad a friend to you as that," continued Georgie, thinking of the good turn she had done her with respect to Charlie Randall, although she was too generous to remind her of it; "and I hardly think I have deserved it at your hands; but it will be the last injury you will do me, Louise. From this moment you and I are strangers."

Views of all she would lose in giving up the acquaintance-ship of the acknowledged daughter-in-law of the Earl and Countess of Kinlock flitted through Mrs. Fletcher's brain, and she was ready to abase herself before Georgie Harrington in order to induce her to change her mind.

"Oh, Georgie, my dear, you *must* forgive me! It was an entire mistake. I never thought Captain Legh would make any use of it; and I will go and confess the whole matter to him at once if it will be of any good to you. Only say you will be friends as we were before."

"No, Louise, I can not say it—it is impossible. The very knowledge has made me no longer your friend. This is the last time you will see me in your house, and I will never receive you in mine again."

Louise Fletcher cast herself on the sofa crying:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! And when I have loved you so!"

"Don't dare to call your feeling for me love!" said Georgie, sternly. "You have loved only one creature — *yourself*—and you must suffer for it. I will never expose myself to your treachery again."

And without another look at the crest-fallen Louise, she passed down-stairs and went to see her aunt, Mrs. Lacy.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE EARL'S ADVICE.

GEORGIE'S visit was apparently timed at an inopportune moment. Mrs. Lacy was laid up with an attack of sciatica, and Marian was from home staying with some friends.

She went up to her aunt's bedroom, but she did not feel disposed to repose any confidence in her respecting Louise Fletcher. She had never been otherwise than friendly with Mrs. Lacy; but they had never amalgamated. The wonder

was, that such a woman as Georgie Harrington had ever made a friend of her cousin Marian. But the tie of relationship carries its credentials with it.

"I am so sorry to find you ill, Aunt Laura!" she exclaimed, as she entered the sick-room. "I came up to town this afternoon with Rachel on a little business, and I thought I would send her to sleep at her own home, and share Marian's bed. It is a long time since she and I had a long talk together."

"Marian is staying with the Miltons until Monday," replied Mrs. Lacy. "I think it is very selfish of her to leave me when I am unable to help myself; but young people will have their own way. I am in dreadful pain, Georgie. I can not turn without screaming; and I have no one to wait on me but the house-servant. Dr. Peebles says I should have a regular attendant; but how can I afford all the waste and expense of a sick-nurse? Marian ought to be here to look after me herself!"

"I quite agree with you, Aunt Laura; and if you will give me her address I will write and tell her how ill I have found you. I am sure she can not be aware of it, or she would return home. Meanwhile shall I leave Rachel with you? She is an excellent nurse, and she will be very economical until Marian comes back; and if I remain here till to-morrow morning I can go to Summerhayes perfectly well by myself. Let her stay with you, Aunt Laura, while you are alone. I know you will find her a comfort."

"It is very good of you to propose it, Georgie; but you always do think of something kind to do or to say. I wish," said Mrs. Lacy, with a sudden twinge of conscience, "I wish, my dear, that Marian and I had always been as good to you as you have been to us!"

"Oh, that's nonsense, Aunt Laura," rejoined her niece, cheerfully. "You haven't been placed in the same circumstances as I have. Now, I shall consider that a settled thing. I shall write to Marian to-night to cut her visit as short as possible, and I shall leave Rachel here to look after you till her return. I would stay myself, but they want me at Summerhayes to-morrow, as it is Lady Alice's birthday."

"And so they treat you just like a daughter of the house?" said Mrs. Lacy, admiringly. "It is wonderful to think of, is it not, when one remembers how they stood off

for years, and treated you as if you were not worthy of their acquaintance?"

"I try not to think of that now," replied Georgie; "and indeed they are all so kind to me and Sissy that I should be ungrateful to remember it. They didn't know me, you see, Aunt Laura; and now they do they make no difference between me and their own daughters. I am just as happy as I can be—under present circumstances," she added, with a sigh.

"And do they live in a very grand style, my dear?"

"Not at all; in the homeliest way possible. We breakfast at nine, lunch at two, and dine at seven, like the commonest of mortals. Lady Kinlock and Hester spend all the mornings looking after the house and visiting the poor. And the earl and Lady Alice trot about the farm, generally accompanied by Sissy. They seldom have visitors, and when they do they make no difference in their plans for them."

"And what do *you* do, my dear?"

"Oh, *I*," replied Georgie, indifferently, "I do anything—read, or ride, or play. It's all the same to me now. Lately I have been rehearsing. I suppose you know that I appear at the Royal Consort on the twentieth of March?"

"So I have heard; but I confess it surprised me. I never thought, when you had been once to Summerhayes, that you would ever step on the stage again."

"But *why*, Aunt Laura? I am only on a visit to Lord and Lady Kinlock. They have not adopted me. And how am I to live without my profession?"

"You must have made enough by this time, my dear, to retire on!"

"No, I haven't; at least, it might be enough if I were quite alone; but if—if—Gerard and I come together again it would not keep us in the style in which we have been accustomed to live."

"My dear Georgie, you are never hankering after that man still, surely! I dare say when he finds you are made much of at Summerhayes he will want to make it up with you; but I hope you have too much pride to consent."

"I don't know what I should do, Aunt Laura. He has wounded my pride so sorely that often I say to myself that it is quite impossible we should ever live together again. But, on the other hand, I feel sometimes as if I were an impostor to take all the benefits they heap on me at Sum-

merhayes, while *he*—their own son—derives no good from being my husband. It weighs upon my conscience, Aunt Laura. I wish Gerard would take an allowance from me; I should feel then that I was doing something in return for his parents' kindness to me."

"I should think Captain Legh could hardly be as mean as that, Georgie!"

"*Would* it be mean, Aunt Laura? You know he married me when I was earning a certain income; and since he squandered his own money, has he not a sort of right to share mine? For he is very poor, you know. Sometimes I can not bear to think how poor he is, and how few luxuries he can have, compared to what he used to enjoy."

And Georgie suddenly laid her bright head down on the counterpane, and burst into tears.

"Well, my dear, your conduct is incredible to me," said Mrs. Lacy, unsympathetically. "Captain Legh didn't think of you in this fashion when *you* were away; *I* can answer for that."

"I know he forgot both me and his duty," replied Georgie, proudly, dashing away her tears, "but people came between us, Aunt Laura, and made our rupture worse. I have found out things—"

"What things?" interrupted Mrs. Lacy, with a quick look of alarm. "I am sure I never said anything but what was calculated to show Captain Legh how wrongly he was acting toward you."

"It was nothing to do with you, Aunt Laura. I was thinking of quite another person. But may I tell Rachel to order up your tea? I shall quite enjoy having a cup with you, when I have laid my walking-things aside."

She dispatched her maid for various delicacies that she thought might tempt the appetite of the invalid; and introduced so cheerful an atmosphere into the sick-room that Mrs. Lacy made an excellent meal, and declared she felt better than she had done since her illness began.

But Georgie's cheerfulness was put on for the occasion. In reality, she felt sore and sick at heart; for it is when those we have trusted prove untrue that we feel as if the solid ground were crumbling beneath our feet.

She was thankful when the time came for the invalid to be left to sleep, and she could retire to Marian's room, which she was to occupy for the night.

She had obtained the address of the people with whom her cousin was staying, and sat down, as soon as she was alone, to fulfill her promise to write and tell her to come home. But it was difficult to find the means of accomplishing her purpose in Marian's bedroom.

Miss Lacy was one of those unaccountable persons who never keep anything in its proper place. Her work-basket was full of old letters—pieces of sealing-wax, and ends of pencils—and the drawers of her writing-table disclosed a heterogeneous mass of undarned stockings, hair-pins, and cosmetics, mixed with broken pen-holders, half-scribbled sheets of note-papers and post-cards.

Georgie found an old blotting-case in one corner, and was turning over its pages mechanically, thanking her stars meanwhile that she was not condemned to live her life in the same room with Marian Lacy, when her eye was attracted by blots of red ink.

Red ink is not used as a rule in every-day correspondence, and the sight recalled a disagreeable memory to Georgie Harrington—that of the notes made upon the pages cut from her husband's diary.

It was strange that she had never troubled herself to discover who had sent her those pages, nor had even connected the idea of her cousin Marian with the sender. For, in the first place, their contents had made everything else concerning them assume a secondary importance. And secondly, they had been sent from Hull, a place she had only heard of before; and she did not know, at the time they reached her, that the Lacys were keeping house for Captain Legh.

Everything had tended at the moment to divert her attention from them; but just now her senses were all on the alert to find out *who* were her enemies, and *who* were not.

The blots of red ink were not sufficient all at once to excite her suspicions with regard to Marian, but they caused her to inspect the paper more particularly, as she recalled the mean trick that had been played upon her husband and herself. And as she did so, some formation in the reversed letters made her seize the blotting-paper and hold it up to the light. To her consternation she read the self-same words:

“These are sent you by a friend. S. M. stands for Sylvia Marchmont. His diary is full of such entries.”

It was her cousin Marian, then, who had plotted to destroy her peace of mind in this dastardly manner! As Georgie recognized the fact she laid down the paper with a trembling hand.

Was there no truth, no honor, among womankind? Could no one of them be an honest, faithful friend to the other?

As soon as Georgie felt calm enough to do it she cut out the piece of blotting-paper from the case, and inclosing it in an envelope, wrote the following lines:

“MY DEAR MARIAN,—I write, by the request of your mother, to ask you to return home and nurse her, as she is too ill to be left alone. In using your blotting-case I came across the inclosed sheet. I understand now *who* extracted the pages from my husband's diary, and sent them anonymously to me in New York, and *you* will understand why I can never trust nor believe in you for the future.

“Yours truly,

“GEORGIE HARRINGTON.”

She had made a vow that she would cut herself off, root and branch, from all those who had helped to separate her from Gerard during her absence in America, and she would keep her resolution. She might have to suffer to her life's end for the breach which he had made, and others had widened between them, but she would save herself, as far as possible, from the indignity of receiving the hypocritical condolences and false sympathy of those who were her worst enemies.

She passed a restless night after this miserable discovery, and returned to Summerhayes as early as she could in the morning; but she did not say a word to Mrs. Lacy of her trouble. She thought it not impossible that she might have known of her daughter's action, and quite improbable that she should see it in the same light her niece did.

The country air and scenery looked bright and wholesome after the dullness and darkness of London; but Georgie could not shake off her depression with the change of atmosphere. She was in a melancholy and half-tearful mood all day; and in the afternoon Lord Kinlock, going into his library, found his daughter-in-law on the sofa weeping quietly to herself. The sight roused the old gentleman's sympathy.

"Why, my dear child," he said, taking her hands, "what is this? Crying on Alice's birthday! Have you heard anything of Gerard? Tell me the reason of your tears?"

"They have nothing to do with Gerard," replied Georgie, as she dried her streaming eyes. "I am crying, Lord Kinlock, over the grave of a dead friendship. It is so bitterly hard to find one has been deceived."

And then she went into detail, and told her father-in-law of her discovery of the falsehood of Louise Fletcher and Marian Lacy. She had to mention the contents of Gerard's diary in the course of it; but though she glossed over the scandal as much as possible, Lord Kinlock guessed all that she omitted.

"My dear Georgie," he said, in return, "this is the usual end of all worldly friendships. It must be evident to you now that these women have flattered you for their own interests, not because they desired your good; and they have been false to Gerard as well as to yourself. For no true friend could wish to sow dissension between a husband and his wife. This is one reason why I so much wish to see you give up a profession which brings you in contact with the more worthless of your sex, and live the rest of your life in the social retirement which your mother did before you."

"But, dear Lord Kinlock," said Georgie, smiling, "my mother had my father to support her, and I have no one. How should I and Sissy live if I abandoned the stage?"

"My dear girl, do you suppose that my home is not always open to you? It is not a very affluent one, but such as it is, I consider you have as much right to it as my own daughters."

"It is too good of you to say so, Lord Kinlock; but I may not always be alone, you know. If—if things should turn out differently from what they are at present, how would Gerard and I live unless I work? Apparently he can not; and yet he loves the luxuries of life, and is not happy without them. It would be foolish to relinquish the only means by which I can procure them for him."

Lord Kinlock looked very grave.

"Then, Georgie," he said, "I am to understand that you *want* to live with your husband again!"

"Oh, no—no!" she cried, "I can not say what I want

or wish; for everything is so uncertain, and my future is so dark, that I scarcely know how to turn myself, nor what will happen to me next."

"It is a deplorable condition for you, my poor child, and I wish I could see it otherwise; but as it is, there seems little probability of a change for the better. My unfortunate son's heart appears to have been hardened by adversity, and I am afraid he has given himself up to evil companions, and yet you can not live out your life like this, Georgie. The anxiety and suspense will sap you of all mental and physical strength."

"What alternative is there for me?" she asked, sadly.

"A separation, my dear. I have been thinking the matter over for some weeks past, and I believe I have decided for the best. A legal separation is the only thing that is likely to bring you rest and peace. You will begin then to think of your marriage as a thing of the past, and in time forgetfulness will follow in its train. You will no longer be in daily dread of seeing your husband's handwriting, or of hearing he waits you in the drawing-room. It is these things, Georgie, that are pressing secretly upon your health. Sorry as I am to say it, my son is utterly unworthy of you. Cast him from your heart, and you will regain your peace of mind. But you will never do that while you run the hourly risk of encountering him."

But Georgie did not answer; she sat with her face buried in her hands.

"I dare say the idea will be painful to you at first, my dear, but I advise you as I should one of my own daughters. Your husband has ceased to care for you. He has given you too many proofs of his indifference for you to doubt it any longer. And under such circumstances it is better you should part; then you would be free to come to me for the remainder of your life, and I should welcome you as another and a dearer child."

"Oh, Lord Kinlock, do you really, *really* think it would be best?" she answered, sobbing. "I know Gerard doesn't care for me *now*, but in time, perhaps—is it *quite* impossible that the old feelings may be revived again?"

"If it were possible, dear Georgie, is it desirable? Would feelings thus revived be worth the cherishing? I think not. Neither, from what I hear, do I think there is any chance of their revival. Come, my dear, let me act for you in this

matter. A few lines to my son will settle the affair; if *he* agrees to a separation between you you can have no further doubt as to his inclinations. Do you consent?"

"Oh, yes, do just as you think best! If Gerard wishes it I shall do so too."

Nevertheless, she was in a terrible state of mind when that letter was dispatched that reached Captain Legh on the same night that she made her appearance in "Haunted" at the Royal Consort.

CHAPTER XLV.

MET TO PART.

To receive such a letter from his father was a much greater blow to Gerard Legh than if it had reached him through the hands of any other friend.

Lord Kinlock was, as a general rule, so temperate in his ideas, so kindly in his judgments, and so well disposed to view every circumstance in its best light, that to pass under his condemnation was to feel that one must indeed have sinned.

That all his family should set themselves up in arms against him on behalf of Georgie was a fact Captain Legh seemed quite unable to digest. Here was she, his wife—whom, *as* his wife, they had refused even to notice—seated in the very midst of them, on a throne of her own erection; his father and mother calling her their daughter; his sisters her constant companions; and Moberley and Helen talking of her as their dearest friend.

It was incomprehensible, and he would not have been surprised to see it end with a fulfillment of Miss Sylvia Marchmont's pert prophecy of seeing all the members of the aristocratic family seated in the front row of stalls at the Royal Consort.

Meanwhile, the earl's letter lay before him, and as he raised his tear-stained and crest-fallen face—ashamed of his weakness even though he was alone—and read it through once more, he felt the only thing he could do was to accede to the request contained in it. He had lost her, and he must bear his loss as other men did theirs—by putting a brave face upon the matter.

He had permitted the cackling tongues of jealous women

to bias his opinion and interfere with his happiness, and Georgie was too much wounded by his conduct to wish to return to him.

He remembered his letters to her—so coldly and cruelly insulting; his behavior when she stamped upon her own pride and called to see him in his chambers, and he exposed her to the humiliation of being laughed at by his servants. He recalled, too, sundry passages in his own life since they had been parted, and acknowledged that he deserved the punishment that had fallen to him.

But it was not the less hard to bear on that account. The idea of parting with his wife forever—of giving up all further claim upon her—tortured him by day and by night. He felt for the first time how much (notwithstanding all his obstinacy) he had looked forward to meeting her again—to asking her pardon for the past—to hearing her declare she had been true and faithful to him. For however inconstant a man may be himself he invariably exacts a strict account from the weaker vessel. He may have sinned against her in every particular, but she must not have given even a look that can not bear the closest investigation. It is the weak spot in the masculine brain, in order to defend which they have generally to carry out their self-made laws at the point of the sword.

But notwithstanding Captain Legh's remorse, his pride prevented his doing what he would have considered lowering to himself, and he made no sign of regret or contrition.

He wrote a stiff letter in reply to that of Lord Kinlock, stating that he was willing to agree to any arrangement that he and Mrs. Legh thought best, and that he had instructed his solicitors, Messrs. Jolliffe, to meet and consult Mr. Harman on the subject. As soon as they had all made up their minds about it he should be happy to sign the deed. He regretted he could not make his wife a settlement suitable to her position, but his father knew what his means were, and that it was impossible. In conclusion, he sent his love to all his family, and he begged to be remembered to Mrs. Legh.

It was as cool and indifferent a letter as a man could write. A keen observer of human nature might have suspected it was too indifferent to be sincere; but no one at Summerhayes dreamed of the tears that had risen to blur

the sight of the writer, nor the groans he had been unable to suppress as he sealed and dispatched it to the post.

Georgie Harrington was by that time settled again in London, and hard at work.

Her part in "Haunted" was a very fatiguing one, and, combined with her anxiety about her husband, soon began to tell upon her. In a couple of weeks she had lost the roses she gained at Brighton and Summerhayes, and looked fagged and worn.

She was in this condition when she received a letter from the earl to say that the following morning had been fixed for them to meet Gerard at Mr. Harman's office, and sign the deed of separation. It was like a knell of death to her. The idea of seeing her husband, and gazing on his face again, sent the blood to her cheeks in a crimson flood; but when she remembered for what purpose they were to stand once more together, it rushed back again, and left her paler than before.

She was very lonely just then; the cruel discoveries she had made cut her off from the companionship of Marian Lacy and Louise Fletcher. She shrunk (she hardly knew why) from the officious friendliness of Lady Henry Masham; and she lived in daily dread of coming across Sylvia Marchmont.

She felt as if her hand were against every man, and every man's hand against her. Her feud with Gerard seemed to include the whole world, and render it barren from Dan to Beersheba.

She looked so ill on the morning of her appointment at the lawyer's office that Rachel begged her not to go out.

"You're not fit for it, ma'am," she urged; "you do look so tired and pale."

"I am obliged to go, Rachel, so it is of no use talking about it; and it is growing late, so you must dress me at once—no; not that costume," she said, shuddering, as the maid produced something that looked rather festive; "I can't wear colors to-day. Give me my black velvet and sable. I feel as if I were going to my death."

"Lor'! ma'am," cried the servant, who was, like most of her class, superstitious. "I wish you wouldn't talk like that; you make me think there's something going to happen."

"Something is going to happen, Rachel; the greatest

event of my life; you will hear all about it by and by. Go and see who is at the door."

"It is Mr. Brabazon Chauncey, ma'am, wants to see you," said the maid, returning from her errand, "but I've said you're ill, and just going out."

"No! no!" exclaimed Georgie, "say I will be down directly. I wish to speak to him."

When she entered the sitting-room, and Brabazon Chauncey met her with an extended hand, she guessed at once that he knew the truth.

"Some one has told you of my appointment for to-day," she said, with a sad smile; "I can read it in your eyes. Are you glad for me, or sorry?"

"I am not quite sure, Georgie. You know well that my sole desire with regard to you is for your happiness. But I should like to be certain that the step you contemplate is for your happiness, before I congratulate you on it."

"You have always looked on my marriage with Captain Legh in the light of a misfortune."

"I did; and in some respects do still. But the question is, whether we can cure a great ill by a greater. Who proposed this separation to you, Georgie?"

"My father-in-law! He considers it essential to my peace of mind that all power to annoy me further should be taken out of the hands of Captain Legh."

"And will that restore your peace of mind?"

"I think so! I am sure it will," replied Georgie, feverishly. "What is the use of hanging on in this way, neither married nor unmarried? Captain Legh is pining for his freedom. The way he behaves is enough to prove that; and every fresh act on his part is a fresh insult to me, whilst we are tied together. Once separated, he can do as he chooses; it will be nothing to me then—nothing whatever."

"You credit a legal separation with an extraordinary amount of power, Georgie. The mere fact of putting your name to a piece of paper is not only to make your husband relinquish all claim on your person, but to wrest him perforce from your heart; for you have not overcome your weakness for him yet, and you can not deceive me into believing that you have."

"I have, at all events, lost all my respect and esteem for him, Mr. Chauncey; and whatever feeling may be left is

(as you term it) weakness. But have you come here this morning to plead his cause with me?"

"On the contrary, I came to see if I could be of use to you. At what time are you due at the lawyer's?"

"One o'clock. It wants twenty minutes of the hour now."

"I shall not detain you twenty minutes! I suppose you know that Captain Legh has obtained the consulate at Barcelona?"

"A consulate! Is he going to work at last? I suppose he finds his income is too small for his indulgences. No! indeed! I had not heard it. How should I? We have no communication. How did he get it?"

"Through the exertions of a friend, I believe. I am glad he has a prospect of work though, for it will distract his thoughts. He is terribly hipped."

"What is he 'hipped' about?"

"Need you ask me, Georgie? Is this morning's business the sort of thing to raise a man's spirits?"

"Mr. Chauncey, are you aware that this separation has been arranged with Captain Legh's entire consent? I may say by his instigation. He has written to me more than once to say he never wishes to meet me again. He has refused to receive me as his wife—even to see me when I called upon him. He has reposed his confidences in, and his affections on, others, and exposed me to the censure of a world which is always ready, in such a case, to believe the woman must be in the wrong. Do you wish me to receive any more insults at his hands, or do you think that these are enough?"

"They are more than enough, Georgie. I don't defend him; but I am sorry for him. I met him yesterday, and I saw that he could not trust himself to speak of this matter. He shows it in his looks. I am sure you will be shocked when you see how altered he is."

Georgie had a difficult task to prevent herself breaking down over the picture presented to her; but she mastered her emotion sufficiently to say:

"I am sorry for him, too. I am sorry for any man who is so mad as to throw his happiness away in the gutter. But it is his own fault. He has only himself to blame; and things have gone too far now to be retracted."

Mr. Chauncey made a last appeal.

"I used not to like Captain Legh, as you know, Georgie; but I think he has had a bitter lesson, and that it has changed him. He does not look like the same man."

"Neither am I the same woman," she replied; "his conduct has made me as hard as a stone. But the time is up, Mr. Chauncey. I must really be going. Good-bye. Next time you see me I shall be free again."

She waved her hand gayly to him as she drove off; but her smile was as ghastly as though it had been on the face of a corpse.

Her thoughts were ghastly, too, as she drew near the place of rendezvous. Her friends (so-called) had dropped away from her like autumn leaves before a storm. And now her love—the love of her life—was to be torn forcibly from her bosom, and there would be nothing left to her—nothing but little Sissy, who could so poorly atone for the loss of all that made her happiness.

As her carriage drew up before Mr. Harman's office the Earl of Kinlock came down the steps to receive her, and, taking her on his arm, led her to the lawyer's private room.

As she gained the topmost stair Georgie paused, with her hand upon her heart.

"Is he," she gasped, "is he—*there*?"

"Gerard, my dear? No, he has not arrived yet; but Mr. Jolliffe expects him every moment."

As she entered the apartment Mr. Harman and Mr. Jolliffe bustled about to place her a chair in the most conspicuous position; but she waved them back, and, seating herself in a corner, watched the door with an eager gaze, that struck the beholders with pain.

Her face was white as marble, looking more so by contrast with the black dress she wore; and her large eyes had deep violet circles beneath them, as though she had not slept for many nights.

The earl and the solicitors discussed the deed they had met to sign in all its bearings, and now and then Lord Kinlock appealed to his daughter-in-law to say if such and such clauses met with her approbation. But Georgie scarcely answered him; she scarcely seemed to hear him. She sat with scared eyes and bated breath, listening to every sound in the chambers below, and waiting for the footsteps that she dreaded yet longed to hear. At last they came, so

slowly and deliberately indeed that Lord Kinlock did not recognize them as those of his son, nor the solicitor as those of his client. Only Georgie knew them, changed as they were, as she would have known them among ten thousand. How she wished he would enter the room! She felt as if another moment of suspense would kill her.

She had meant to be so brave and cool; but as the door opened to admit her husband she involuntarily uttered a little gasping cry. Gerard heard it, and turned toward her, and the blood rushed in a torrent to his face as his eyes rested on her form again. But the next moment he had remembered himself, and, bowing to her as if he had been an ordinary acquaintance, he held out his hand to his father. Lord Kinlock took it, but rather coldly.

"I wrote you word that I had been offered and had accepted the consulate at Barcelona. You might congratulate me on my appointment," said Captain Legh, trying to speak calmly.

"Better late than never!" was the earl's caustic reply. "The same proverb might apply to your engagement this morning. It would have been more becoming of you not to have kept Mrs. Legh and myself waiting."

"I am sorry," he faltered. "I—I—did not feel very well. I came as soon as I could."

"Now you are here, we had better go through the deed again, and if you have any objections to make you can state them."

"Very good. I am ready," replied Gerard, as he took a seat, with his profile turned toward his wife.

All this time Georgie had made neither sign nor sound. The only idea which possessed her was that she must bear up until the ordeal was past.

As she sat in her corner, not daring to look at her husband's face, she kept on praying for courage, and not to degrade herself by an exhibition of her real feelings. But the torture she was undergoing was depicted on her countenance. Her white features twitched convulsively, and her eyes looked like those of a dying animal. Lord Kinlock perceived her emotion, and approached her kindly.

"Come, my dear girl," he said, "this is an unpleasant ordeal for you, but it will soon be over. You have heard the different clauses of the deed of separation, and Gerard has no fault to find with them. He has appended his sig-

nature to it, and now we want yours. Courage!" he continued, in a lower voice, as he assisted her to rise from her chair. "It will not take a minute, and then I will see you home."

Georgie struggled to her feet, and staggered to the table. It would not take a minute! It would soon be over! Only a minute to open the gulf between her and Gerard that no after-penitence could bridge over again. Only a minute to sign away the happiness of her life—to give up all claim to love her husband, to nurse him in sickness, cherish him in health, to have any share in his pleasure, any right to weep over his grave!

The awful solemnity of the moment overwhelmed her. She took up the pen with a shaking hand, and tried to form the characters of her name. Her fingers seemed nerveless.

In her despair she lifted her eyes and met those of her husband fixed upon her. They revealed a world to her. However they may have misled others, Georgie read the whole history of his sufferings in them, and with a low cry of mingled pain and pleasure she fell fainting to the ground.

The whole office was immediately in confusion. Messrs. Harman and Jolliffe rushed about frantically for glasses of water, and Lord Kinlock hastened to the assistance of his daughter-in-law. Only Gerard stood apart with a glad hope in his breast to which he dared not give expression.

After a few minutes of unconsciousness Georgie came back to herself. She looked from one to the other in confused amazement, and then relapsed into tears.

"Oh, Gerard!" she murmured, below her breath—"Oh, Gerard!"

Captain Legh was by her side in a moment.

"Georgie," he said, tenderly, "is it possible? Can you and I part *forever*?"

"It is not possible," she exclaimed, as she flung herself into his arms. "I am your wife—you are my husband! Whatever we are we must cling together to the end."

"Why, what is this?" cried the earl, who, although he could not hear distinctly, retained the full use of his eyesight. "Do you mean to say you two are going to make it up again?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it?" replied Georgie, raising her tearful eyes to his. "Oh, Lord Kinlock, don't try to

argue against it now! Let us hear his explanations first, and then—and then—”

“Then if they are not satisfactory, we can come back and finish signing these papers. Is that what you mean, Georgie?”

“I don’t know what I mean,” she murmured. “I only know that I have him back again, and that I am happy. Gerard, do not leave me! I have suffered so much in this separation. Whatever happens let us bear and fight against it together. My first love—my only love!” she whispered, as she clung to him. “I would rather die with you than live with any other man!”

“And believe me, dearest,” he answered, in the same tone, “that, whatever my failings may be no woman could ever stand in your place to me. We have had a bitter lesson. Heaven grant its fruit may be joy and peace!”

“Mr. Harman and Mr. Jolliffe,” said Lord Kinlock, “I think we will defer this meeting to another occasion.”

“Delighted, my lord, I am sure—delighted!” exclaimed both the lawyers in a breath.

“Well, Gerard, you had better take your wife down to the carriage,” continued the earl, “and I will get home as best I may by myself. I fancy you can do without me now.”

“*Never!*” cried Georgie, as she lifted her face to his. “To the last day of my life I shall associate this happy moment with your kindness and your care.”

And so the sun of love broke out from behind the clouds of despair and illumined the dusty office with his refulgent beams.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AT SUMMERHAYES.

ON the following Sunday the whole party were assembled at Summerhayes, and Gerard and Georgie were seated on a sofa by the library fire, recounting to each other a dozen little adventures which had escaped their memory before.

Captain Legh had occasionally to halt and change the subject, as he trod on dangerous ground; but Georgie went

almost as much about you as she did herself. Was it not so, Miss Harrington?"

"I am afraid I was very selfish in my trouble, Mr. Boch, and made myself a terrible nuisance to my friends."

"But you are all right now?" he said, smiling.

"Yes," she answered, with a glance at her husband, "I am all right now."

"And where is my dear little friend Sissy?" continued Hiram Boch. "I have an especial message for her from Paris."

"Sissy will be charmed to see you. She talks of her dear Hiram incessantly. Gerard, please touch the bell, and tell them to send her down to us at once."

"I will go for her," replied Captain Legh, as he left the room.

"Mr. Boch," said Georgie, earnestly, as soon as they were alone, "I owe you a deep debt of gratitude on my own account. It is for what you did for me with Mr. Maxim. It has all come out through Brabazon Chauncey. I know you will not let me repay you in the common sense of the word, but you must let me thank you for your tender consideration of my needs."

"Be happy, Georgie, and I am more than repaid. There was a time, as you know, when I was too selfish to have found happiness in witnessing your reunion with your husband. But that time has passed away, and I see all things in a clearer light; and I believe he will be more worthy of you in the future. He has passed through a scorching fire, and it has cleansed and purified him. He will not risk losing you a second time."

"I think so too," replied Georgie, with the tears standing in her eyes. "We both needed a lesson, and we have learned it thoroughly. And with the work you have been so good as to procure for him, Gerard will recover his self-respect—never again, I trust, to lose it. The difference in his behavior to my little sister in itself shows how anxious he is to redeem the past. She is *almost* as fond of him—not *quite*, Mr. Boch—as she was of you. But here she comes to speak for herself." At which juncture, Sissy, appearing on the threshold, rushed vehemently forward, and flung herself into the arms of Hiram Boch.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come! Oh, don't go away again! This country is detestable without you!"

"There's a welcome!" exclaimed Gerard, laughing; "and from a young lady in her fourteenth year. I wish the girls would run after me in the same energetic fashion!"

"Why, my little Sissy," said Hiram Boch, when he could disengage her arms from round his throat, "how you have grown! You will soon be as tall as your sister. Well, I must have had some premonition of this when I selected your *cadeau* in Paris. You have outstripped toys altogether."

"What is it?" whispered Sissy.

He replied in the same tone.

"Georgie! Georgie!" she exclaimed, in a burst of delight, "he has bought me a watch! Oh, Hiram, how nice you are! I have been longing for one day and night!"

"Let us go and find it, then," he said, as he led her away.

"What a fine fellow he is!" remarked Gerard, looking after him.

"You may well say so, darling. If you knew all, you would say more of him than that!"

"Suppose I *do* know all, Georgie? Suppose I know that you might have thrown me over and taken him instead—what then?"

"Why, then you must feel *quite* convinced that I love you better than anything the world can give me, Gerard!"

* * * * *

Three years have elapsed since then, and the consul and his wife are still in Barcelona. A strange rumor has come thence lately—that a marriage has been arranged, and will shortly take place, between Hiram Boch and Berthe Harrington, and that the next time he crosses the Atlantic the millionaire will take with him the youngest and sauciest woman of fashion that was ever elected to reign over the society of New York.

How Mrs. Legh regards the probable parting with her sister has not yet transpired; but there is a baby in Barcelona who may possibly make up in a great measure to his mother for the loss she will experience in Sissy.

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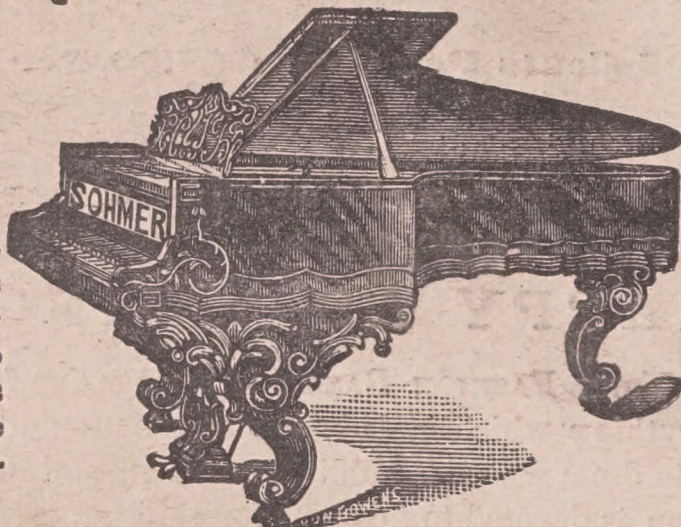
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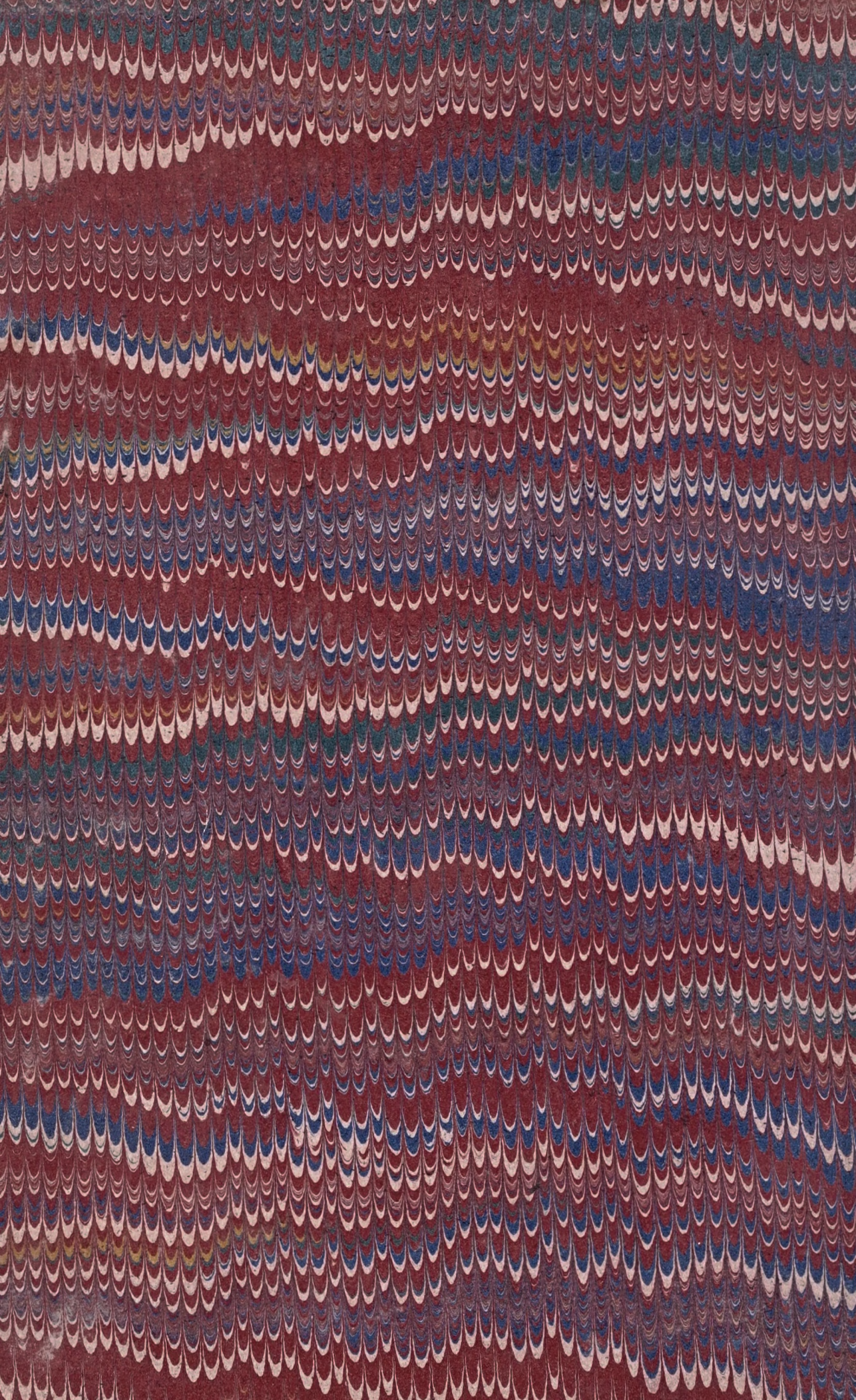
St. Paul Office, 159 E. Third St.

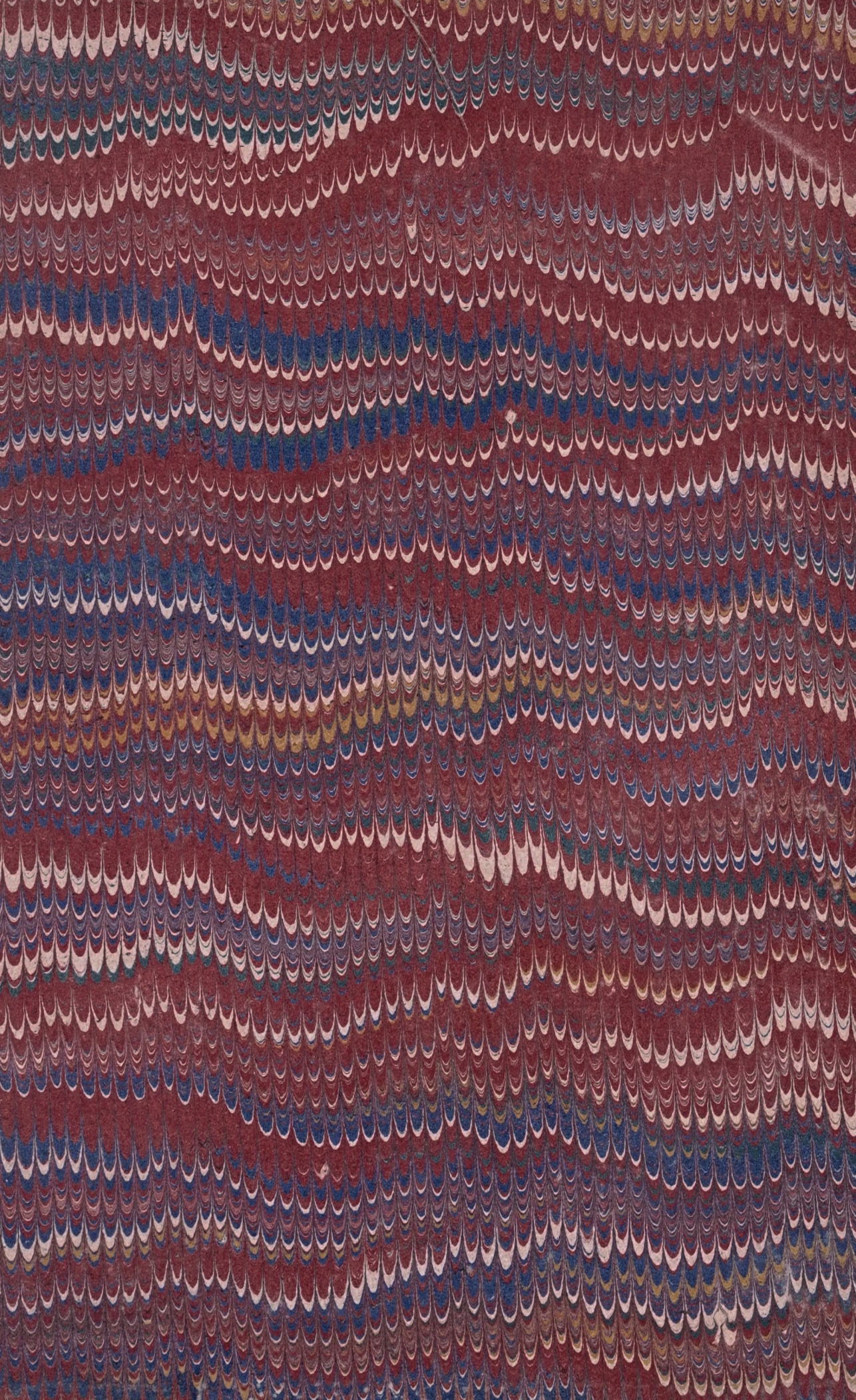
Denver Office, 8 Windsor Hotel Block.

San Francisco Office, 2 New Montgomery St.

Milwaukee Office, 102 Wisconsin Street.

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